A Season's Harvest

1977

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Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

A Season's Harvest

Swami Venkatesananda

1977

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Serve

I thought during these few evenings we might take up one by one the four famous words of Swami Sivananda which have gone into our motto: 'Serve, love, meditate, realise'. I do not know if we understand what it involves, what it means. I heard somebody say the other day, 'We do not believe in any worship, in any form of meditation, and so on.'

There is only one worship, which is service, service of the sick and suffering, uplifting humanity. 'Our God lives in the sick and the poor', - it is marvelous to hear. Very often the mind that hears this, is a mind that is not interested in being uplifted. 'I want to uplift the poor people.' Who are you to uplift the poor people?' 'I want to uplift the downtrodden'. What about you? But when you hear it, 'Oh, it is glorious'. But what is hidden, is the subtle mischief that I feel that I am great enough, big enough to uplift others.

Recently I had a very interesting experience in San Francisco. There was someone there whom I call Kali. Kali does not mean a fearsome deity, but according to me, is a female spiritual aspirant who goes on collecting skull souvenirs. The male counterpart is Dattatreya who had 24 gurus. This Kali is one who goes after every guru or every swami or everyone that comes along and collects a souvenir; you know, Kali is supposed to have a garland of skulls. And so she can point out, 'This is Swami So-and-so, all these swamis I have met, and all their instructions I have received, all their blessings I have received, and so, I am somebody superior to you. How many gurus do you have? Only three?' Eventually she was fortunate enough to meet someone who made her a swamini. So, flowing in robes, she came to see me one day. That swami who made her a swamini went back to India and she has lost touch with him, God knows why. Now, she has a very real and serious problem. 'That swami has made me a swamini, which means that I must have some following.' If you are a teacher, you must have students, if you do not have students, you are not a teacher, even if you are qualified to be a teacher. So, how do I become a swami if I do not have any followers? I pointed out to her that it is not necessary for all swamis to have followers. A guru must have disciples, a swami need not have anything. A swami is a fakir, I am a swami, I just walk around, that's all. 'Ah,' she said, 'That is very good, alright, now I plan to go to India, and I will spend 2 or 3 months there. Can you introduce me to some great person or ashram there, where they train gurus, because I want to become a guru'?

Of course, if I am a guru, I can uplift everybody, I can spiritually elevate everybody and all that, but am I the right person for the job? I can elevate the downtrodden, I can serve the poor, I can serve the sick, heal the sick and all that. Am I qualified to do that? If you are not qualified to serve, you may end up in a very comic situation. A big man hired a servant who was so totally devoted to the master that one day, when the master was sleeping and some insect was crawling on his cheek, he took up a big stone and smashed it on the master's face. My homoeopathic teacher used to say, 'Sometimes we can treat people, serve people

so wonderfully, that not only the disease, but even the patient disappears'. So, first of all, I must know if I am the right person to teach, to spiritually uplift and elevate and all that. And one should also know what it is to serve.

The first is easily disposed of. I have never heard our Gurudev say, 'I am a guru, I am here to teach everybody, I am here to save everybody, to redeem everybody.' He never said so. And even when He seemed to teach, suddenly after a few moments, His whole behaviour would change and He would say, 'I have told you what I think, consider it, do what you like.' And if it was a platform talk, He would invariably say, 'This is my service, this is my worship, this is my prayer; I am merely sharing.' He was equally eager to sit and listen to others, to you and me, anybody. In the whole of India, I have not seen one great swami who was as eager to listen as to teach, or probably more eager to listen than to teach. So, this teacher mentality, the guru mentality, He avoided almost completely and totally. I have lived with Him and watched Him from moment to moment. One could never find this guru business, except on one occasion: when He gave sanyas diksha. Then, for a few moments, He was like a blazing fire, and as soon as the initiation was over, He once again became a grandfather. 'What would you like, a cup of, tea? You must be tired, have a cup of coffee,' That was His attitude.

When it comes to service, we can readily see three words which represent what we are talking about. One is labour, the other is work, the third is service. The action is exactly the same. Whether you treat what you are doing as labour, or work, or service, the action is exactly the same. But there is a vital difference. Labour is when you are forced to do something with all your heart and soul. I think we must change it to head and soul, not from heart to soul, but from head to soul - you are rejecting it, rebelling against it, you do not want to do it, but you are forced to do it by all sorts of circumstances. You want to earn a living, and you are made to do something which you hate to do. Or you love somebody, and that somebody makes you do something. There is a split here - that is when people get into psychological difficulties, depression. And headache and all sorts of psychosomatic disorders set in.

I have never heard Gurudev mention that He had to do something or He was made to do anything. Whatever He did, He enjoyed. And even when it was working or earning His livelihood, which He did in Malaya, before He became a swami, even then He used to tell us that He was extraordinarily keen because He looked upon it as work, not labour. He got His salary and He got His income from the work, no doubt, but in addition to that, He did a lot more than He was expected to do, or He did what He expected to do, which was not officially expected of Him. The more work He had, the more He threw Himself into it. He used to tell all sorts of stories about the days when He was a doctor in Malaya. He was a doctor, and His business was to treat patients; but then, if the dispenser was absent, He did that work also, why not? And if the accountant was absent, He did that work also, and naturally when they saw that He was eager to take on any job that was there for Him to do, they made it available. One day, the accountant was sick, and the other day the compounder was sick, and so it went on. So,

whatever He did, He enjoyed, because from whatever He had to do there was always something He could learn, either a skill or about Himself, how much energy or vitality there is, how it could all be used; and while He was doing it, He never rejected, never regretted, there was no tension within at all.

'This is something I do not want to do, this is something I have to do,' that was not there at all. Only once, long after He had become a swami,' He said, 'I did not know I would have such a wonderful field of activity at this time of my life, otherwise I would have conserved my energies a bit more when I was a doctor in Malaya.' It was because of the strenuous life He led in Malaya that the body fell an easy prey to illness, lumbago, rheumatism, diabetes and all that. So, labour was something that was totally unknown to Him. And if you are able to enter into the spirit of this, you will probably see that who does not regard anything as labour, enjoys the work. There is nothing the mind rejects, there is no grouse and there is no grumble. There is a delight in whatever I have to do. What I have to do, I love to do.

There is one little snag in it, we will come back to it. 'I love to do'. Why? Is there a motivation? That might come and worry us later, but then that motivation is there, whether we regard it as labour or work. What is work? Work is something which we do. We do not particularly enjoy doing it, nor do we particularly suffer doing it. It' is okay, I have to do it, I will do it. That is called work. Most of us know this. I think. When there is no inner rebellion, you function just doing what you have to do. But then there is the question of motivation. What makes me do it, why should I do it?

It is here that most social workers run into difficulties. You can do a lot of social work. It is not that social work is discouraged. Gurudev encouraged social work, but with this difference: while doing that, I must also be aware of the motivation. The difference between work and service lies entirely in this motivation. The action is the same. What you are doing can be work or service, depending upon the motivation. In the case of work, there is always a motivation. 'I' am doing this because ...' This also was totally, completely absent in Gurudev, and I believe that even when He was still a doctor, it did not matter at all what He got out of that work. He did what He had to do with great joy. One must be careful here. At that time, He was not a swami, and if you pardon my saying so, probably He was not interested in this karma yoga and all that. It is not necessary that one should have a theoretical knowledge of karma yoga and the Bhagavad Gita in order to be able to do that.

What Krishna taught Arjuna is common sense. And if my intelligence is awake I see this common sense point of view without having read your wonderful scriptures and so on. If my intelligence is asleep, even though I go on listening to all this everyday, not a drop goes anywhere inside. If the intelligence is awake, it sees that every motivation leads to some difficulty, every hope inevitably leads to frustration, it must. An expectation must lead to disappointment. If it does not do so today, it is an accident. If what you expect, happened, it is a sheer coincidence.

A man of awakened intelligence sees what is simple, what is totally clear. Of the first five attempts I succeeded once. I expected something to happen five times, but it happened only once, four times there was failure. So what is closely, directly and intimately connected to the expectation? Failure, frustration, that is all I see. The intelligence that sees this, drops the expectation.

When the expectation is dropped, the frustration is also dropped. If I do not expect anything, there is no frustration. That is what Gurudev saw even when He was in Malaya. He used to work, He worked very hard from morning to night, expecting nothing. This is the second aspect of it. Can I work, can all my actions proceed without being motivated by expectation, by hope? Where there is no expectation, there is no fear either. Where there is no hope, there is no fear. 'I hope that it will turn out that way.' That statement, that feeling is invariably accompanied by, 'I am afraid it may turn out to be different.' Where there is no hope, there is no fear, there is no frustration. This is still work. In Malaya Swami Sivananda was very enthusiastic in His work. Of course He was prosperous too, that goes without saying. That is another remarkable and wonderful and beautiful truth. He did not say, 'Well, I have no motivation, I do not expect anything from you, and I am doing this which is a bit of work.' When the doctor or the nurse serves you in that fashion, you show your gratitude by giving a coconut or a couple of bananas or five rupees. Gurudev never refused it. Just as I do my job, my work, you must also do your work. If my work is to treat you as a doctor or as a nurse or as just a nobody, and if you wish to do something about it by showing your gratitude in cash or kind, well, you are free to do that. That was another extraordinary feature in Swami Sivananda. I have seen hundreds of swamis who would not touch money, would not accept a donation. He said no. If somebody gave Him money, He took it. In the pure spirit of sharing. If I am to do what I have to do with delight, with joy, then you can also do what you want to do equally with delight and joy. Once Swami Sivananda said - which is an exact translation of a verse from the Bhagavad-Gita, I do not know if He quoted from there, 'Do not ask, do not reject'. 'He is a true sanyasin who does not reject nor desire.' Then you are free, instantly free - psychologically.

So, even in Malaya when He worked as a doctor, He did His job with the greatest delight, avoiding all motivation, no motivation of amassing wealth - wealth comes without your running after it. Reputation comes without your running after it, if it has to come. If it does not have to come, it will not come. Without any of these motivations, He was busy. There is a verse in the Bhagavad Gita: 'Yoga is skill in action, efficiency in action.' Efficient action is possible only if your whole being is involved in that action. It is not possible for you to be totally involved in that action if your mind is split in at least two halves. You are thinking of the future, and, now, hopes and expectations and fear create a future.

It is when you hope that a future is born. If there is no hope, there is no future. If there is no fear, there is no future. When you create a future by projecting a hope, or a fear, then your action is unskilled because you are not 'there'. One small part of you is 'here' doing the action, the rest of you is projected into the future,

fearing - 'I hope it turns out that way', 'I am afraid it might turn out the other way.' If you are totally 'here', your action is perfect. If your whole being is 'here' and 'now', without any part of you being projected into the future, that action is total and therefore efficient.

I have heard that professionally Gurudev had no failure at all. Professionally absolutely no failure, even though He did not even complete His medical course. He succeeded by merely being totally 'there' in every action, and that was His characteristic throughout His life. Whatever He did He did, with His heart and soul completely, completely. Every action, whatever He did, was done totally, and that was because he never considered a future or linked His action to the past. The future came, the future must come. The future rolls along and, as it reaches you, it becomes the present. That is the present, it is called present because it is the gift of God, every moment is presented to you, and when it reaches you, it becomes the present, a present from God, a present from time. So, without bothering about the future, if you live and function whole heartedly, then every moment of your life becomes a delightful present, a precious present.

It was only after He became a swami that He evolved the other philosophy of service as service. We didnnot discuss this aspect with Him at all, but I have a feeling that He must have seen that whatever you do, ultimately turns out to be a failure, in a manner of speaking. You can go on treating a sick man and patch up whatever holes he has, eventually the fellow dies. Then you begin to wonder, 'Why did I have to do this and why does the man have to die?' Then you say, 'The whole thing was a waste. Wat have you done? Nothing'.

This must have hit Him at sometime or another. It was then that Gurudev evolved this famous word 'serve'. It is not labour, it is not work, it is service. Service is always with humility, with love. How does this humility arise? What is humility and how does it arise? It is not a show, it is not a formula. Humility something which arises in your heart when you realise that it is not this person - 'I' am serving. I am not serving any personality, I am not serving anybody. It is to the Indwelling Spirit that this service is directed.

So, there is no labour, there is no work, there is no hope, there is no reward, or hope for reward, but everything that I am able to do, I consider already a blessing. It is not that I am doing this in order to gain a blessing. The doing itself is a blessing. That is the very essence of this first word, serve, and it had to be seen to be believed.

Swami Sivananda was very fond of doing little physical services, and even then He always folded His palms and said, 'Thank you for letting me do this.' When He gave something, once again, 'Thank you for receiving it.' He was always grateful to the person who enabled Him to do a little bit of service. I heard this expression a million times. 'I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity to serve you.' So, to be able to serve, is itself a great blessing. When this attitude is found, not acquired, found in the heart, then that life itself becomes a blessing. How does

one do that? By directly seeing, not thinking, that it is not the body that I am serving, it is not this somebody that I am serving, it is the Indwelling Spirit of God that I am serving. Then it is not I who am serving, it is the same Spirit of God that dwells in this body who serves the Spirit of God that dwells in that body. When this vision or realisation is gained, then there is true humility - not till then. True humility is not possible till this vision is gained.

Love

I do not know what idea or concept of God you have. God 'is'. Therefore he is called Ishwara. God is infinite, or eternal. In essence it means that God is not something that can be reached or acquired. You have to lose yourself in God. You have to be absorbed, totally absorbed in God. 'How do you get absorbed?' A question which was very beautifully answered by some children the other day. One girl said, 'Obviously there are two to start with. But when one becomes part of the other, then one is absorbed.' Can I similarly be totally absorbed in God? That is called love, that is called bhakti. So, all my actions must be directed towards God. God being not something that I can acquire as a gain. God being infinite, the relationship between me and God has to be one of my being absorbed in him.., If my action or service has this as its goal, then it becomes yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, you can call it what you like. It is only if we bear this in mind that we can understand how Gurudev was able to live and function, work, serve, without expecting anything in return. My whole life is dedicated to God, not even to God-Realisation. Therefore the mind does not ask for a reward, not even 'to go to heaven'. The mind does not ask for a return, because the goal suggested for this life, for this dedication, for this service, is God himself, who is 'here and now', everywhere, and I want to be absorbed in God.

So, I want to be totally absorbed in God, but not by not doing. It is not possible. Not even for a single moment can you remain doing nothing. Doing nothing is a misnomer, a contradiction in terms. Doing is doing, doing means doing something. Even if I sit in the half lotus posture with eyes closed, that is doing something, and even if I do not talk to you that is also doing something. So, it is not possible for you to do nothing. Therefore, let whatever you do be directed toward this goal, the goal which is here, right now, and that is to be absorbed in God. Then even the actions are directed towards this omnipresent Being. That is the beautiful vision that Krishna gives us in the Bhagavad Gita.

By worshipping that omnipresent infinite Being with everyone of one's actions, man reaches perfection, and that is what I saw in Gurudev's life. Whatever He did, had God as its goal - not only its goal, but also its source. Can I do anything at all in this world? Who am I to serve? Am I doing anything at all? I am supposed to be sitting and talking here. But am I doing, am I talking, am I doing anything here? If so, what is the 'I' that does it? If one inquires into that, one arrives at the understanding that it is not me. It is some intelligence, some power, some energy, some shakti that does all this, and therefore, if the feeling that what I am doing can be merged, offered, dedicated to God, then there is no feeling 'I am doing this' and the opportunity is not given to the mind to produce the next phrases: 'Because I want to gain so-and-so', 'I am doing this in order that I may become famous, or to gain a material or psychological reward' - nothing. Because I am not doing this at all. The source of the action is God, and the goal of the action is God. If this is not there, no service is meaningful, for it will necessarily be tainted by vanity on the one hand, and seeking for reward on the other. Both of these must lead to frustration. If I go on thinking 'I am doing this, I am so and

so, I am somebody', when that action is made impossible, then I am frustrated.

This is something which I never saw in Gurudev. He was very active at one time, and when the body underwent the natural change of old age, there was no regret at all, there was no looking back. Instead, 'This is what there is now.' In common language, it is God's will that this is what must happen now, this is all that is possible. It is not 'I' that does it, it is some other power that does it, and that power, that energy, that intelligence knows what should be done, how much, how far and in what manner. In our case, it is the ego that keeps on pushing the body, prompting us, pushing the mind, and when that pushing is not possible, you get frustrated. Especially when you start thinking, 'I used to do this, I used to do that.' It is the 'I' that used to do and is not able to do, or the 'I' identifies itself with something which happened before thinking, 'I did it', 'I did not do it.' It happened. In that simple truth the yogi sees that the 'I' is not the doer. Something made it happen then. Something does not make it happen now, something makes something else happen now. From that he derives tremendous strength. That is how Gurudev lived. He never looked back, He never bothered to compare His present state with a previous state. Why? Because He knew - 'I' is not the doer. The action springs from the same Chit Shakti, the divine power, the divine energy that is prompted by God-consciousness. That is what works, let it decide what has to be - I shall neither be idle nor push myself, entertaining the notion that I am doing this, I will not do this, I will do only that.

In order to achieve this, one has to have a total understanding of the divine or God. Gurudev therefore combined very effectively what are separately known as karma yoga and bhakti yoga. To him, serve meant love, love meant serve. So serve, love. Without love one cannot serve. Then it becomes labour, then it becomes work. If it is labour, you are tortured within yourself, and if it is work, you are looking for a reward, and so asking for frustration. If it has to be service, it can only be based on love, otherwise it is not service - and if there is love in your heart, you will serve. No force is necessary, no persuasion is necessary, love expresses itself spontaneously as service.

What is essential for that is God- realisation, whether you want to practise karma yoga or bhakti yoga or whatever yoga you feel like, it is God-Realisation that makes it possible. What is God-realisation? The direct understanding of the truth that God is real. God-Realisation is not looking at the tip of the nose or between the eye-brows and seeing a vision. You can see a vision if you want, no harm. But God-Realisation means the direct understanding in which there is not a shadow of doubt that God is real. At times we think there must be a God. We get some windfall or we think, 'Ah yes, God is giving me this because he knows I deserve it'. Or something goes wrong and we wonder how God can be so cruel. We believe in this God, occasionally, when it suits us. So, the rest of the time God is not real, to us. Is it possible for us to live in such a way that God is real all the time? That not a shadow of doubt arises in the heart, not a cloud of doubt or vacillation passes over the mind and the intelligence. That is God-Realisation. Whatever happens, can I know that this also is the will of God?

Never mind whether people call it pain or pleasure, happiness or unhappiness, success or failure - these all arises from God too. That is what I saw in Gurudev. Whatever happened, He might or might not have said in so many words, 'This is God's will', but we could see it because there was absolutely no resistance to it. A certain circumstance arose, and in that, what had to be done happened. And what had to be done also happened because there was this total surrender. When there is direct understanding of the omnipresence of God, then there is immediate surrender, and that surrender is love. When you realise that God alone is, then the 'I' is surrendered, that surrender is love, bhakti. In that love, you will still function, you will still carry on, what has to be done has to be done, because it is determined not by the mind, but by God himself.

That was the beautiful life we witnessed in Gurudev. There was this love, there was this surrender, but as long as life continues in the body, the mind also functions related to this body. So, a sage or saint has to live in such a way that there is this consciousness of the Omnipresence, the Infinite, even though the consciousness of the diversity is not lost. While you are in this body, you are still related to this body, and it is no use bluffing, 'I am the Infinite'. You are not the Infinite. The Infinite is. All of us are little sparks of that infinite. So, there is this consciousness of all of us as well as of the Infinite. It is an extremely delicate subtle tight rope-walking. You must live and function in this world and yet you should not lose consciousness of the reality of God, the One in the many, the Imperishable in the perishable, the Infinite in finite objects. Can one keep this consciousness intact? That is the question, and that is the question I saw answered in Gurudev's life.

It is only in that heart there can be love, where you do not want to meddle with the other person. In His own ashram there were people who were hatha yogis, there were vedantins, there were meditators, there were mounis who would not even talk, there were dynamic workers, all sorts of people, smokers, thieves too. And from His point of view they were all manifestations of the same being. In and through them, it was God who was laying all sorts of different roles. That was the most beautiful way of living, seeing God in all, the All and the God within. The All is not neglected, so that when He saw a sick person, He saw a sick person and God indwelling. Can I sustain this dual consciousness, see the unity without pretending that I do not see the diversity, the unity being the divine and the diversity being the manifestation, the appearance, the forms? Only then, is it possible for a person, truly, sincerely, without hypocrisy, to love all. People of all religions - I do not think He even as much as recognized that there were different religions. He recognized of course that people worship in different ways. There was no condition, 'If you do this, I will love you.' That is not love. That is a bargain, that is some kind of business - this I never saw in Swami Sivananda. He never insisted that His disciples should all be His disciples only. Even if you were a sanyasi disciple of His, and suddenly said, 'I want to go and learn from that master,' He would say, 'Go, please go.'

That is the beauty of love. There is no argument, there is no condition at all, because love or God-realisation or bhakti or service is possible only if one is dead within oneself, only if the I, the ego is dead. So, the other side of love is death. Kill this little 'I', die to live. If I do not die to this little self, to this conditioned existence, to this feeling,'I am this body', then there is no love, there is no service, and there is no 'God-Realisation. Only he who is able to see God in all, and all in God, lives in God, in God-Realisation. In order to make this God-Realisation real, Gurudev exemplified in bhakti His own life in all its aspects.

You might gather the impression that his was a completely inner spiritual or intellectual affair; it was not. He was the most inveterate idol-worshipper I have seen among the great saints. It was both His exercise as well as His example, but it was not worshipping the idol as idol. How do I know what it feels to be in the presence of God? What does it mean when I say, 'God is real? If I am able to see 'God in this image of God, then it is possible for me to experience being in the presence of God. It is not idol-worship as an end in itself, but idol-worship as part of this total scheme of experiencing the presence of God. Is it possible for me to experience the presence of God here? God being omnipresent is here also. If I can gain that experience here, then it is possible for me to use that as a touchstone to see whether I can also have the same experience in the person I am serving. If 'I' stand in front of that statue of Venkateswara, and fold my palms and feel the presence of the divine there, and then I greet Mataji, I can see, Aha!, the same feeling is not there. So, in order to be sincere in this adventure of God-Realisation, I learn to feel the presence of God in and through something. Gurudev was very particular about it. There was not a single morning when He did not perform His own little worship in His own little shrine in His room. It is then .that one can really and truly ensure that the proper attitude is preserved in all one's dealings, otherwise the little service that we may render each other will degenerate into personal social work - I scratch your back and you scratch mine. Then attachment develops.

He loved all, which means he loved no one in particular. It was the Cosmic Being, the realisation of the Cosmic Being that flowed from Him in Him as love. That love is possible in us only if we remember God and remember death at the same time. If I am able to do this, the self dies and God is realised. He was also fond of the 10th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna gives a list of special manifestations. He used to do it Him self - coming out of His kutir he looked at the Ganges: 'I am the Ganga among rivers,' and then He looked at the Himalayas:, 'Among stable objects, I am the Himalayas,' and then, He looked at the sun: 'I am the sun.' He also composed a lovely vibhuti yoga song in which He used to sing, 'I am the taste of coffee in coffee.' If you are drinking coffee, know that the taste of coffee itself is God. When you smell jasmine, 'Ah, this is divine.' When you look at a beautiful flower, the beauty in that flower, is divine. In this manner, He extended the vibhuti yoga to cover everything, whatever he saw, whatever He experienced everyday, whatever He came into contact with, every moment.

Thus, one should develop this narayana bhav, seeing God in all, without neglecting anything, any form of worship. When the mind is tempted to abandon one form of worship, the thing that says, 'I do not want ritualistic worship', is still the ego. And as long as the ego is so active and vital, God-Consciousness is impossible, Cosmic Consciousness is bluff. That which says, 'Why should I do this ritual? I have gone beyond this, will inevitably come up with other suggestions: 'Why should I indulge in this kind of service? I like some other kind of service.' 'I like, I do not like'. That is what we are supposed to abandon. It is this. 'I like' and 'I do not like' - that should be abandoned, because they spring from the 'I', from the ego, and as long as the ego exists, these likes and dislikes will continue, and when the likes and dislikes have gone, the ego will disappear, has disappeared. All these go together, come together, rise together, fall together. When the ego is totally absorbed in the divine, only then is service possible. Service implies love, the love is of all, and the many. God and all beings - all beings in God, and God in all beings.

Meditate

The third word that formed the foundation of Gurudev's teachings is 'meditation', and it had a completely different meaning for Him. Meditation is not something which can be or should be practised as an exercise, only as an exercise, for an hour in the morning or half an hour in the evening, though He did not exclude such practices, just as in in order to realise the Omnipresence of God, He also worshipped an image. In order to integrate meditation in life, He also practised some meditation as an exercise, but that is not the whole thing. I may engage myself in an exercise called meditation occasionally, but to call that meditation is defective. A soldier may have to train himself by shooting at a sandbag, but that is not a war; war comes later, the real test comes later.

This meditation must be the spirit in which I live. Meditation which is unrelated to life is useless. Meditation that is related to life becomes the vital part of life, just as the heart, as long as it functions, keeps the entire body going, keeps all the systems go because the heart is functioning. If the meditation is correct, then life must flow on smoothly. If there is some hitch in your life, that means your meditation is wrong. In other words, meditation must become one with life, or life must become meditation. If your total life becomes meditation, then there is absolutely no scope for a problem to arise.

You regret having done something later only because you were not meditating when you did something. You were not aware, you were not conscious. So, a life which is filled with this meditation is what Gurudev called divine life, when the divine forms an integral part of life, when there is no distinction between divine and living, when living becomes divine, when the divine is realised in and through life.

How can I meditate while at the same time living a full life, without regarding meditation as something outside of life and without allowing life to be lived haphazardly, blindly, foolishly? Once again we go back to the words of the Gita: 'He who sees Me or God in all, and he who sees all in God, is forever active, but does not get lost in that action.' That is, the action is not blind action, or motivated action, selfish action. Selfish action assumes the existence of a thing called self. This selfishness and the inevitable motivation arise when consciousness is not alert. Such an action is bound to run into difficulties. What happens if I do not gain what I wish to gain? What happens if the self that assumes that I am sitting and talking is hurt by someone making an unpleasant remark? So, as long as this self, this I, is allowed to rise, and the self is allowed to function in an assumed relationship, with a motivation, it is bound to run into difficulties. The awakened intelligence on the other hand does not solve your problems; it avoids problems, it does not allow the problem to arise. Incidentally, if a problem has arisen, the best thing is to let it run its course and get out, not pay any attention to it.

So, in Gurudev's case, meditation was life itself, not even part of life. He also

insisted on what we call the practice of meditation, and there again He had a fairly simple approach to it. When He asked people to meditate, it was to repeat a mantra, nothing more. I think there is a marvelous secret in it. I think we all know of any number of techniques of meditation, self enquiry, transcendental meditation, tantric meditation, buddhist meditation, tibetan meditation, all sorts of things. Many of these are born of the mind. It is the mind that creates these techniques.

When the mind creates a technique, it becomes a thought. I can sit here and visualize a great big mandala, and think about all those different features in the mandala, it is a good thing. My mind is kept busy. But, it is not meditation, because you are merely thinking, the mind roams in a field created by itself. After one hour, you get up and walk out, and you are quite calm and peaceful and happy. Probably your thoughts started wandering, and it is quite possible that some stray thought entered into the field of your awareness, and you think it was a psychic or inspirational experience, which is nothing but the attention running off at a tangent. Your mind is occupied, but you still do not know what the mind is, and there is no meditation. Such a meditation is useless, unrelated to life. Whereas, when Gurudev said, 'Sit and repeat a mantra, do japa,' He insisted that you must be aware that you are repeating the mantra, otherwise you may be sleeping. So, I am sitting alone repeating this mantra, and the very fact that I am aware that I am repeating the mantra ensures concentration. The attention is totally focused on the mantra. So far as Gurudev was concerned, that was enough. That is all you and I can really do. The rest has to happen. If I am to be sure that I am repeating the mantra, my attention should be completely focused on it. This is the exercise.

Now, at some time or other, the question must arise - the mind should not think that question, it must arise - 'Where does this happen? Where am I hearing the sound? What is this sound? Or, who is repeating this mantra?' That must come in its own time. I cannot start asking myself this question, that looks funny. When you are asking, it is the mind that is asking the mind itself who is repeating the mantra. 'I am repeating the mantra.' 'Who are you?' 'I am Swami Venkatesananda.' The whole question is absurd. It takes you nowhere. There must be total attention and, in total attention, these questions appear spontaneously.

That is what Gurudev was concerned with, but it is only an exercise. He insisted that even during your daily activity this mantra should go on as a background of thought. Build the mantra in such a way that it goes on as a background of thought, whatever you are doing. That seems almost to contradict His own teaching that your whole mind must be concentrated on the mantra or upon what you are doing. But it is not so. You are probably familiar with this when you are doing something, like driving a car or walking or doing something which you know very well how to do. If you watch your mind at that time, is the whole of your mind occupied in what you are doing? Never. While you are doing this, the attention is scattered in a thousand directions. So, building the mantra as a

background of thought restricts this dissipation of mental energy. Instead of these thousand things, you think of just this one thing, the mantra. The mantra goes on as a back ground and the action goes on. If you become an expert in that, then suddenly you become aware of the one and the many. The one being the background of thought - the mantra, and the many being all the different actions, the different thoughts and so on, that we engage ourselves in. The 'I' has gone, because I was repeating the mantra, and the mantra took over, became real. The mantra shakti has been awakened, so that the mantra shakti has become the 'me', the 'me' has become the mantra shakti, and so, this mantra shakti is watching the thousand actions that are taking place. That's it.

This cannot be brought about by desiring, willing, or working towards it, it has to happen. By building this background of thought, the scattering of attention is avoided and the energy is all completely concentrated in this mantra which forms the witness, as it were, of the activities of the body and mind; and therefore there is no distraction at all, you become very efficient. It is not as though you are absent minded. Very often people mistake absent-mindedness for what Gurudev was teaching, that is, you sit and you do something, and you make a mess of everything and say, 'You know, I was absorbed in saying the mantra mentally.' A person who is absorbed in the mantra mentally is terribly efficient. Why? Because the mantra, this background of thought, prevents the attention being scattered, the energy being dissipated, and therefore there is no absent-mindedness there. It is not I who is sitting and talking, the mantra chaitanya is there alert, that is, the consciousness is alert, and that consciousness oversees all the thoughts and actions that proceed. That was the meditation that Gurudev taught. Such training made it almost unnecessary to practise a thing called meditation. It is not something apart from life, it is apart of life. It 'is' life. So that, for a moment, it looks as though you are standing at the threshold between the one and the many, between God and the world, which is his own manifestation. And it is there at the threshold that you suddenly realise: this is one, this is many, but they are the same.

One who is practising this is undistracted. Gurudev had a very special expression, called battlefield pratyahara. Pratyahara is when your attention is totally abstracted or pulled away from the external world and then focused on the object of meditation. Pratyahara is one of the limbs of raja yoga: ashtanga yoga. And it is usual to suggest that you must go away and seclude yourself in a cave or somewhere, and shut off all your senses, withdraw the senses from the objects as a preliminary to the practice of meditation. That is not necessary. It is possible to sit in the most crowded area and let the mind turn its attention upon itself, and this background of thought, the mantra, will do it. If it is practised properly, the mantra enables one at a moment's notice to withdraw the total attention from dissipation, from being scattered on a thousand things, and so have the attention completely and totally focused upon whatever you choose. And since this attention or intelligence is ever alert, it does not allow you, or the doer of action or the thinker of thought, to do anything which you will regret later. It is there - luminous, bright, awake, alert. In that awakened alert intelligence, error is not

possible, shadow is not possible. Shadow does not fall on the sun. This background of thought, this meditative mind being more brilliant than the sun, does not allow a shadow to form on it, and therefore that life is an enlightened life. This was the extremely simple form of meditation that Gurudev lived and taught.

Is it possible for me to assume that I have built this background of thought and I am an expert? It is possible for us to bluff ourselves, because it seems to function, and then we think, "Of course I am very calm and alert,' because, in order to observe the one and the many at the same time, the attention has to be very tranquil. Only a calm mind can pay total attention. And it is possible for us when we are training in this to think, we have reached the meditative mind. Then some disturbance arises in life, and you are carried away, you are gone. How did I get into this mess? When you thought the observing attention was still and calm, it only meant that there were no serious problems in your life. You only had a little candle, which is alright when there is no wind, but when that little candle was confronted by a little bit of wind, it was blown out and the alertness disappeared. It was for this purpose Gurudev insisted that even though you think you have reached the other shore, why not sit and meditate for a little bit in the morning? What is wrong with sitting down for a little meditation, morning and evening, treating yourself as a student of meditation, making sure that even though the candle may be a small one, even that little candle is kindled and bright? And therefore once again He was extremely regular in this morning and evening meditation.

Apart from that, He had another remarkable exercise to sustain this meditative mind. When He was engaged in some kind of activity, once in a while He would suspend that action. This is what most of us do not do. Whatever be the work you are engaged in, it is always possible to suspend that work for a few moments now and then, and regain contact with that background of thought. The immediate benefit is that pressure does not build up, and if the activity you are engaged in is likely to cause conflict between you and somebody else, there is a chance for you to break it. That is possible in our life, if we again cultivate the habit of pulling the attention back into the background of thought every now and then. Apart from all this, whenever He re-entered His kutir, always He used to pace up and down for a few moments on the veranda chanting 'Om,' and we who might be with him, we suddenly found it strange. He was talking to us, joking with us, teaching us or teasing us, and then suddenly He was gone, He was somewhere else. That was how Gurudev transformed life into meditation, and that was His version of meditation, which is meditation in action, meditation in daily life.

Realise

The last of the four words that comprised the motto which Gurudev gave us is the word 'realise'. To realise what? To realise means to make something real. One cannot make the unreal real, that is not possible, and it is not necessary to make the real real. The real is already real. What does this 'realise' mean, then? It really and truly means the quest of the real, seeking the truth all the time. Are we aware of the truth? We are usually not. We are aware only of what we think is the truth, which is an opinion. That is where Gurudev's divine life begins.

Satyam, or the discipline of truth, is more than merely saying what you think is true. There was a swami in Rishikesh, whatever he felt, and whenever he felt like it, he said. If he thought I was a fool, he said it. That is not being truthful, that is being rude. A person who is devoted to truth, on the other hand, would hesitate to say such a thing, because if the expression 'You are an idiot' arises in his heart, he immediately sees that it is only an opinion, his opinion. Is it true? It may be true, I am not saying it is not true, but the true seeker after truth does not blurt it out. He does not even say, 'I think you are an idiot. That is what I think, what have you got to do with it? It does not concern you at all. It is my own thought.' Who is an idiot? Something within me is an idiot. So, first and foremost, I never heard Gurudev express an adverse opinion about anybody. Why? I am looking for the truth. There is a feeling in me now that you are a fool. It is a feeling, it is not truth, it is momentary, so it is not worth expressing. The first and foremost discipline he taught us was, 'Do not express an adverse opinion. Glorify, glorify everybody.' Why? Because eventually you learn from the scriptures that man is made in the image of God, so there is no harm in glorifying everybody. So, when it comes to expressing an adverse opinion about somebody, hold your tongue. This is one of the most fundamental, vital and important disciplines of truth that Gurudev practised and realised.

To realise - to be constantly in quest of truth - to distinguish truth from opinion - to note that this is an opinion and not truth. A mind that is trained to distinguish the true from the false. This appears to be something, but what is the reality, what is the substance? A mind that constantly seeks the reality in life is not affected by the appearance. It does not have to reject the appearance, it is unaffected by the appearance. You cannot reject the appearance first. What you see with your physical eyes is the appearance, what the mind sees psychologically is a concept. You cannot look at me with those physical eyes without at the same time seeing the physical form, and with your mind without a concept of the name and form arising in your mind. That is not possible. But what is the problem here?

The problem is a confusion. Though this is merely a form, you think it is the truth. Though this is merely a concept arising in your mind, you think it is true. It is that confusion which creates all the problems in our life. The reality does not cause any problem whatsoever. Nor does the unreality cause any problem, because the unreal does not exist. What does not exist, how does it create a problem? In the mind there is a confusion; if this confusion can be resolved, that

is, if the form is seen to be the form, that's it. If the form is realised as the form, if the concept is realised as the concept, if the opinion is realised as an opinion, that that is what it is in reality, then it does not affect you at all. You are able to live in this world without being confused by it. I am still looking for the truth, but I see that this is an appearance. I am still looking for the truth, I see that this is an opinion.

When it comes to what people say and what people said, this is where you really come to grips with this problem. Please do not forget that Gurudev was also the head of an enormous ashram, and He Himself used to say it was a world in miniature. There were all sorts of people there. Among His own disciples were people of divergent views, many different characteristics, many different qualities, many different views and approaches. I wanted to say that, in spite of this diversity, they all had one thing in common, devotion to Gurudev. Even that, shamefully, was not perfectly true. So you cannot even say that it was their devotion to Gurudev that held them together, it was His devotion to them that held them together, His totally indiscriminate love. That love is again born of the manifestation of this relentless quest of truth. Someone walks in and says, 'I want to realise God. Please help me.' What is your reaction? 'Show me your credentials. How do I know that you are a true seeker after truth?' What is it that says so? Suspicion. I think or I feel. It may not be the truth, and so judgment was instantly suspended. Gurudev never judged because judgment arises from your opinion, if it is based on truth, truth must reveal itself. Truth does not require an advocate. It is its own evidence, light does not need another lamp to illumine it, it is its own light. So, truth being its own light, my opinion need not come into this problem at all. Truth does not create a problem. It is when falsehood is mistaken for truth, in psychological confusion, that a problem arises in life.

It is common practice in Rishikesh to greet one another with, 'Om Namo Narayanaya.' It is a holy expression, it means: 'I greet the God in you.' Even in Rishikesh you can find people greeting each other in this way without meaning a thing. When Gurudev said 'Om Namo Narayanaya,' you could see from His face He was looking within. Is it true what you are saying? Your lips are saying, 'I greet God in you.' Is it true? Is that how you feel now?

You offer flowers at the feet of Gurudev's statue or Venateswara's statue there. Luckily the statues are made of gold and bronze - anything else would break. I have never seen Gurudev do that. Why? I am not worshipping this bronze, I am not worshipping that stone, I am worshipping the Lord who is present here. And when I offer a flower at the Feet of the Lord, am I sincere, am I seeing the Lord here or not? When Gurudev offered a flower at the Feet of Krishna in the ashram temple, it was as though He saw someone sitting there and very gently placed a flower at his Feet. It was the realisation. I am looking for the truth. I am telling myself, 'I am worshipping God here.' That must be true, that must be realised.

Gurudev was looking for the truth. He was not examining the stone image to see if it was truly God or not. When I approach this statue with a flower in hand, I do

so because I feel the presence of the divine. And if that can be made real, if truth can be infused into that feeling, then it becomes truth.

He was also fond of satsanga, because it is exalted as one of the gatekeepers to moksha, liberation, in the Yoga Vasishtha. Satsanga and vichara, these two are very powerful aids to atma jnana, self-knowledge, or liberation. And the satsang that we are following here is about the same pattern that Gurudev established in the 1940's. Why is this necessary? In satsanga, one is reminded by the study of these scriptures of the reality as it was experienced by sages. It is obviously not my experience. These scriptures are pointers to truth, or at least to the probability that this is true. You hear an Upanishadic dictum, 'I am atma brahma', 'All this is the Supreme Being himself,' or 'All this is consciousness,' 'Consciousness is the Self.' These are words, and you cannot practise these teachings, you cannot apply these teachings to your daily life, because they are not cosmetic. You merely hear these teachings - that is what Gurudev used to do and encourage others to do. You sit there and meditate rather than just listen to it.

Keep your whole being open, not only the ears. Let the expressed truth, which is the experience of others, enter the ears and be imprinted on your heart. This is Gurudev's own favourite expression, 'The Upanishad must come from your heart.' That is why 'hear' and 'heart' are very similar in spelling: it is the heart that hears. You hear it with your heart, and then, when the heart becomes saturated with this truth, your awareness, which is in search of it, experiments with this truth, discovers this truth, and becomes the truth. So then, the truth that was enshrined in the scriptures springs from your own heart, becomes the truth of your own life, and living truth. When this Upanishadic truth pours from your own heart, not even from your experience, but from your heart, that is it, that is the only thing which can be said, and that is the only thing that He said. Then you find that you become, you are the living truth. You started out in quest of truth, as if this truth was there and I am here, seeking it. Then, at another stage, you are the living truth. The quest has come full circle, and there is complete and utter silence. There is no seeking anymore, but there is no problem either. The unreality does not exist, or the unreality does not have any glamour for you to be tempted or distracted.

This is the realisation that Gurudev placed before us, and this realisation demands a completely still mind. It is only the still mind that can see the one and the many, the substance and the appearance, without being confused. It is only the still mind that is able to perceive the world within, the world of ideas, and the world in which the body moves, without confusing one for the other. And it is the mind which is ablaze with this quest for truth that can burn up every little bit of confusion as it arises. The opinion that wishes to usurp the place of truth is burnt, immediately, instantly. Opinion is seen as opinion. It is that mind which is capable of merging in cosmic consciousness.

I have pointed out also that Gurudev made no distinction between His own

disciple and someone else's disciple. To Him, in the ashram, all were swamis, whether they wore orange robes, or white robes, or no robes. Whenever He spoke to someone, He would always fold His palms very humbly, because, 'I am speaking to a manifest divinity'. Not words but action. When you gave Him something, He very rarely used the words 'Thank you', except when it came to some foreigners. But in His look you could see gratitude. And when He gave, again, there was this same gratitude on His face. The distinctions disappear between the giver and the receiver, between man and woman, between one disciple and another disciple, between my ashram and someone else's ashram. Once He visited Swargashram and they received Him very nicely. He sat there and started giving instructions to them and to all of us. For about an hour, it looked as if Swargashram was His, and it did not matter whether the other ashram existed or not.

I never saw a distinction made by Him. These distinctions are opinions, conventions, and maybe necessary. He was the President of the Divine Life Society, of course. That is a matter of conventions, that is an administrative necessity, it maybe needed, but it is not the truth. The truth is, he and I are one. The truth is, this ashram and that ashram are one. Again we saw it during the All-India Tour. He became one with the masses of people who came to listen to Him. At any of those thousand places where He addressed huge gatherings, He could have collapsed and died. Never mind. That was no problem, they and I are one, they are my gods, they are living divinity, I am surrounded by this Cosmic Being. There is no life, there is no death. It comes in practice, it comes naturally. It is not as though Gurudev sat there and said, 'These are the people whom I have to address today. Well, according to the Upanishads they are manifestations of the Cosmic Being.' All this is mental gymnastics. He was there and there it was the truth. And to such an extent that He could spontaneously look upon someone who came too kill Him also as a manifestation of god, and fold His palms.

It happened on January 8th, 1950. Somebody tried to hit Him with an axe and kill Him, when He was sitting in the dark in the bhajan hall, and nothing happened. Two of us were working in the office, when a swami came flying from the bhajan hall, terribly excited and worried, and we picked up our lantern and walked up the hill. And as we were half way up the hill we heard, 'Om sarvesham ...' Then I knew that Swamiji was alright because nobody else could have the presence of mind and the calmness in such a situation to go on doing the shanti mantra. And when we arrived, Gurudev was quite calm. And He could worship that man. The unreal ceases to be confused with the real. Here is a man, man is what I see. 'They say he came to attack me and kill me', that is only an opinion, not truth. But what is truth? Whatever is, is truth.

Once He even jokingly remarked, 'I may have had visions of rishis and maharishis, and even of divinities while practising meditation in Swargashram, but all that is still in the realm of duality. I see the maharshi, I experience the presence of God, I experience the other.' Is that a valid experience or not? Maybe. It may be a valid experience. But what is maybe is not truth. Because there is still

the experiencer, the subject who seems to stand aside. There is still a division, and where there is a division, there is also confusion. Gurudev had such experiences. He did not give them as much value as truth, as becoming the living truth within himself, as truth possessing Him, being absorbed in truth, so that the truth lives for ever and ever.

That was Gurudev's teaching concerning 'realise', and it is because this was His realisation that we feel that He is here and in our heart, everywhere. We feel that He is here, and it is up to us to realise His presence.

Is an Ideal Life Possible?

Is an ideal life possible? This question occurs to most of us because we are used to considering that the ideal and the actual are irreconcilable and opposite. By an ideal we mean something which is up there - which is impossible to actualise.

The ideal life is described in the Bible, in the Quran, in the Bhagavad Gita, and in the Upanishads, but somehow we feel it is theoretical and not related to practical life. So we have committed ourselves to the understanding that the ideal and the practical are two completely different and irreconcilable factors.

The fundamental scriptures are diverse in their views - their teachings seem to be contradictory within themselves. When you go to the great religious teachers, their opinions also seem to differ. What is ideal life and who determines what the ideal is?

My feeling that an ideal living is possible here and now, springs from my own personal observation of a very great master, Swami Sivananda, my Guru. I am sure that there are other similar masters of equal spiritual stature, who have exemplified and lived the ideal life. We usually say they were divine, they were born saints, and we are little mortals, small little human beings. What applied to them does not apply to us. We even quote scriptures in support of this - 'Many are called but few are chosen' - but we forget the other quotation - 'What I have done, you can also do.' If they have been able to live the ideal life, here on this earth, living and functioning as human beings, it is possible for you and I to live an ideal life. That was perhaps the reason why they lived as they did - not only because it was natural to them, but because they wanted to exemplify such an ideal life. I may suggest that even an attempt to follow their example is productive of great blessings.

When you realise the factors that are involved in it, you begin to manifest these factors in your daily living. The scriptures teach, and the lives of great men exemplify, that you should not be aggressive, you should be loving. I see with my whole heart and soul that this is the truth and that it must be manifest in my life. Then immediately I find that aggression, irritability, anger, hate, and dislike, build up. I come face to face with what I consider to be the obstacles to this ideal living. I want to be loving, but I find myself living a life of aggression, of hate, anger, and dislike. I discover that this is the obstacle.

How many lovely escape mechanisms we have provided ourselves with, so that we do not have to live an ideal life. For example, I think 'I want to love all, but how can I love him? It is he who makes me angry, and upsets my equilibrium, my balance of mind.' One who wants to lead an ideal life immediately reflects on the holy exemplar of ideal living - the master, and one realises that the master also was subjected to calamity, insult, and injury, and he did not lose his balance of mind. Suddenly I see that the obstacle is not outside, but it is in me.

What is the first and foremost obstacle? I am not sincere, I am finding excuses for my behaviour - I rationalise my behaviour. I find justification for my rudeness. If I am sincere and I want to be loving, nothing in the world can upset me, can make me aggressive, can make me hate. So, right, at the very beginning of our attempt to live this ideal life, we discover that the only obstacle to this is within oneself - it is not the external circumstances, but the internal reaction to those circumstances. What causes this reaction? It is my own insincerity, I am not keen, I am not sincere enough, I am not honest enough.

If you are sincere and keen, you will discover that nothing from living an ideal life, a life of peace, a life of truth, a life of love, a life of joy and happiness within oneself.

The Main Ingredient - Faith

Faith is one of the ingredients of ideal living, for the simple reason that, if I do not have faith, I do not even try. In order to have faith, I must have a basis, otherwise doubt haunts my whole outlook and my effort is weakened - there is no energy. The basis of our faith is the life of a living exemplar, even more than the teaching. I have seen my guru, Swami Sivanada, who led an ideal life and demonstrated and made clear to us that it is possible. He was a great inspiration to us.

The word 'inspiration' also means 'take a deep breath'. Perhaps it got its dual meaning in a very significant way. When you see someone who does something fantastic, you gasp, 'Ah, what a marvellous person he is.' If you had watched me during those few moments, you realise immediately that, whereas the person was fantastic, the inspiration was done by me, not by him. So, he provides the opportunity for me to inspire. The inspiration has its origin there, but that inspiration must enable me to look within. He has pointed to the possibility of an ideal life, and it is possible for me to do what he has done. Even if he is too great in comparison to me, the very attempt at looking within on the basis of the inspiration provided by him, enables me to discover an important and most wonderful truth - that the light is within, as well as the veil of ignorance. There is hope, there is faith - I can also do it. For a brief moment, I feel tremendously uplifted, inspired. I want to be like that. Then comes the doubt and the vacillation, born of the veil. I must realise that this light as well as the veil are both within. The energy and the weakness, the faith and the doubt, are all in me. So, I do not blame anyone or anything outside of myself. I have to discover within myself what the light is that shines, radiating hope, and what is the veil that makes me doubt? Maybe it was only possible for him, not for me.

What is that veil? Or, what are the obstacles that I find to this ideal living? Why am I not able to rise, what is pulling me down, what are the obstacles?

There are a number of obstacles, all of which are interconnected, interrelated. To say 'the ego' or 'ignorance' is too vague. We shall take a few obstacles one by one, during the coming talks, and try to look into then to see and to understand what they are, and how to overcome them - not to examine, analyse nor intellectualise them, because then you are trapped in your own net. For instance, perhaps right now as you read these words your mind is ticking away saying, 'Oh, that's right' or 'No, that's wrong'. When you think either of these, you are not looking within yourself; so, the attention is diverted and therefore the vision becomes blurred. When the vision becomes blurred, you blame it on me or on somebody else and say, 'He confused me.' He did not confuse me - I was not looking where I was supposed to look. The words are external, but the meaning is in me.

When an obstacle presents itself, can I look directly within to see what the obstacle is, without blaming anybody or without depending too heavily on somebody else, without dismissing all this saying, 'Oh, it is ignorance' or 'It is

ego', because someone else said so? If I can do this, the seeing is the light and the obstacle becomes clear.

The Pursuit of Pleasure

The first and foremost obstacle is pursuit of pleasure. Pleasure and pain are part of life just like day and night - you cannot get away from them. An ideal life is one in which there is no pursuit of pleasure - the pursuit of pleasure being the other side of the coin of avoidance of pain. If pleasure is a part of life, pain also is part of life. Just as the day dawns and comes to an end and the night comes, even so pleasure will come and pain will come.

Pleasure can also be understood quite simply. What gives me pleasure? I see something very beautiful or I touch something nice. Or I taste something sweet. The body comes into contact with something I like and in that contact there is a plain and simple neurological response. The sensation of pleasure arises in this contact. It is neither in me, nor in that object. If it is in me, why should I not have this pleasure without that object? If it is in the object, why does that object not give pleasure to everybody? It is only when it comes into contact with me that there is a sensation of pleasure. Then you put a spoonful of honey into your mouth, there is the taste of sweetness, there is pleasure - which is finished in a few moments. While this is going on, the mind intervenes. It registers this sensation and confuses it with the object that you had, craves for it and runs after it - therefore there is vain, stupid, foolish pursuit of pleasure.

This pursuit of pleasure is constant pain. One who understands this, becomes introverted, whether he is in pain or in pleasure, and this understanding itself is non pursuit of the thing called pleasure.

Pleasure and Pain are Both Natural to Life

Sorrow and unhappiness are not natural to life. Natural life - the ideal life, should be free from sorrow. We know from sleep that natural life is free from sorrow. In sleep there is no unhappiness.

Pleasure arises when the physical organism comes into contact with an object. Pleasure is neither in me nor in the object, but arises on account of this contact between the two. The mind steps in here and creates a confusion and, on account of this confusion, there is pursuit of pleasure. Pursuit of pleasure is born of ignorance of the nature of pleasure.

Pleasure is inherent in life and it comes and goes - it is a flow, a movement. When this is not realised, you strive and struggle to hold pleasure, and in the very act of holding it, you destroy it. Therefore, one who pursues pleasure is always miserable, is always unhappy. He does not even enjoy pleasure which is natural. He is worried about the future and the past.

I think - the mind thinks - that this pleasure arose when I came into contact with that object. What is wrong with considering that this is the object of pleasure, and that it is going to give me pleasure all the time? If only I can keep this object with me, I can derive pleasure at will indefinitely.

The first and foremost problem with that attitude is that you have lost your centre, you have lost self-knowledge. Life is useless minus self-knowledge, minus this centredness. It is not self-centredness, but being centred; it is not drifting, or restlessness, but being centred in oneself. When one is centred in oneself in this way, one has a tremendous insight - which is very important to life itself, not only for ideal living. In order to avoid sorrow, there must be this insight, undimmed and undistracted. When this insight is not there, I am ruined, I continue to confuse everything. I think the pleasure comes from there, and therefore I pursue it, not realising that the pleasure was temporary because of some contact, and that pain will come shortly. Because I think my pleasure comes from an external object, I begin to depend upon that, and I blame that for my unhappiness. If that goes away, I blame i,t and if is comes too close, I blame it - so that I am completely lost. I am at the mercy of everything that happens around me, and therefore I am constantly unhappy.

Pleasure and pain are both natural to life. They cannot be avoided. Here again we are referring to physical or mere neurological response, not psychological pain or sorrow. This neurological response of pain is the most vital thing to life. Life sustains and protects itself from danger only by pain. Your fingertips feel pain if you touch a burning object; so you draw away - the burning creates a painful sensation. Pain is as essential as pleasure, but again confusion enters into it. Something happens which is natural to the course of life and my nerves are hurt. The mind again jumps into this, associates that pain with that object and begins to hate that object for no reason.

This hate is on the same level as the pursuit of pleasure - pursuit there, hate here. You run towards pleasure, you run away from pain - which means you are running all the time. You are never stable and you do not have a stable character, a stable personality, a steady mind, a peaceful and blissful mind. So, the mind interferes in what is a natural experience - the experience of pain - and interprets it as coming from that or person, and hates that object.

From thereon, the confusion multiplies, grows bigger and bigger. First I hate the object and then I hate all those things and people and so on who are associated with that object. For instance, if I came into your house and tripped over the stairs, I not only hate the stairs, but I hate you - I hate the whole situation. So, hate is generated in my heart, and between these two - sorrow and hate - I am constantly swinging like a pendulum.

In this conjunction rises a third and most omnipresent and pervasive trouble - fear. Where there is hate, there must be fear! When there is pursuit of pleasure there must be fear. I am afraid that the object of pleasure may be taken away, I am afraid the object that I hate may come to me again and again - and life is one continuous self-torture.

This is what one would call the most un-ideal life, it is not the right way to live. Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita insists that the ideal man is one who is free from the pursuit of pleasure, from hate and from fear.

yatendriyamanobuddhir munir moksaparayanah

vigatecchabayakrodho yah sadamukta eva sah (V:28)

With the senses, the mind and intellect controlled, having liberation as his supreme goal, free from desire, fear and anger - the sage is verily liberated forever.

As I have seen one person at least, my guru Swami Sivananda, who was an ideal person of this description, I think it is possible for you and me - for all of us - to rise to this stature - if we have insight and understanding.

Three Questions

Question: To the layman, ideal living connotes the time he spends in his home with his family. To what extent do you think that the present rapid evolution of life influences his family life?

Swamiji: The pace of life does not interfere with the insight that we have been emphasising. However, the cultivation of insight demands a certain external, and perhaps internal, calmness of mind. If that calmness is not there, then obviously insight is not possible. If the pace of life is too fast, it does not allow for any time to be spent alone with oneself, nor the opportunity to dive within, even for a few moments. Only to that extent the pace of modern life makes it more difficult but not impossible.

I say it is not impossible because once I have acquired this insight, then I am not at all affected by the external circumstances, or the pace of life. Once the lamp is lit, whether the darkness is dense or not, you are unaffected. So, one needs inner tranquility and a certain time, especially during the training period, to cultivate this insight, this inner awareness.

Question: It is common belief that tribesmen living a primitive life in jungles are miserable compared with their city counterparts, who enjoy the benefits of science etc. Could you please enlighten us Swamiji?

Swamiji: The primitive tribesman may not have a coloured television set and a nice car, etc, but it is rather doubtful if we, living in what has been appropriately called 'concrete jungles', are really better off for these blessings of science and technology. I am not sure that I agree that we are essentially happier than the primitive tribesman. I have seen villagers in the Himalayas who are far away from 'modern civilisation', and they seem far happier than we are.

Question: What is the place of religion in living a happy life daily?

Swamiji: Religion came into being in order to enable us to realise what ideally happiness means. That is the purpose of religion. One might even say that that is religion. I do not have to call it Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Buddhism.

An ideally happy life is one which is free from the pursuit of pleasure, the least tinge of hate in the heart, and from fear. These are the essential factors of our life, and when we realise that, that is religion. A quotation from the Bhagavad answers the question ideally:

vitaragabhayakrodha, manmaya mam upasritah.

bahavo jnantapasa puta madbhavam agatah (IV:10)

Their heart is pure and they have reached sameness with Me. They have become

one with Me, says incarnate God, Krishna. They come one with the Divine when the heart is purified, when their whole heart is filled with the Divine.

Everybody is subject to pain and pleasure, so we are not running away from any of these things, but there is no pursuit of pleasure - nature functions. Neither is there a place for hate in natural life. Hate is totally unnatural.

Fear is always irrational. The most stupid thing in life is to be afraid of death, knowing that it is inevitable. No one ever asks himself why he should be afraid of something which is natural and inevitable, and in the fast pace of city life, one is not allowed the time to reflect on what a stupid, ignorant thing fear is.

We are also afraid of illness. The body is well equipped to deal with illness, but it is not equipped to deal with the fear of disease. Fear is itself a disease and the mother of all diseases. I do not have cancer now, so why should I say that I may get cancer in fifteen year's time? I need the time, the inner tranquility to enable me to reflect - 'It is not here now, so why should I be afraid of it?'

Some people are afraid of walking in a cemetery. This is totally irrational fear; it is the most peaceful place on earth. I have even met people who are afraid that someone is influencing them through black magic. What he might do through black magic, might happen to me because I step into the road without looking to the left or right.

When we awaken this insight, when we examine life, when we examine all these ignorant notions that we have, then fear vanishes. We are not talking about what makes you run away from an oncoming car. That is not fear, that is intelligence. We must distinguish between the operation of this inner intelligence which protects the body, and hence which protects life, and a totally irrational thing called fear.

Who is completely free from craving for pleasure, from hate and from fear, is a religious man. Faith in God is added onto it.

The Memory Pattern

Interviewer: I have heard all that you have said on the previous evenings. Why is it that these thoughts of fear and anxiety etc. go on? How can I stop them?

Swamiji: The questioner says, 'I have heard all that you have said about fear, about anxiety, about hate, and yet what I am hearing does not bring about the end of all this'. I hear this, but what I hear and what I understand intellectually, does not produce the desired effect in my consciousness, in my mind, in my heart.

This is the problem of everybody in this world. We all hear talks, sermons, lectures and discourses and it has often happened that for a moment we feel, 'My God that's it, I've got it'. Then we go home, the same problem arises and we are the same old fools. 'Why is it so?

There are two things here. One, who is it that hears? Who is the 'I' that listens to these words? Two, where do these emotions arise? Unless that person who is listening receives the message, it is not heard at all. It is totally superficial and therefore absolutely useless.

All the teachings of very great ones are found to be ineffective because the listener is a prejudiced being - not open and fresh. If the listener - that is me - becomes completely clear of all the past muck and nonsense, then the teaching acts instantly. Someone says, 'You said one should not have cravings. Of course I do not have any cravings at all, but I love my wife and I love my children and this love is very good.'

Who said so? Somebody else said so. You read in the Bible or in the Gita. Here the teaching was received by the loaded, polluted mind and it has no effect at all on you. That is the most troublesome part of listening. To listen is to be alert, but completely unbiased and unprejudiced. That's not easy.

The hearing must be done with the heart and not with the brain. The brain is polluted. Can I listen with the heart, free from all prejudices, free from all bias, without accepting or rejecting what you say, without saying you are a marvelous person? We do not want to pay tributes to each other or say that what you say is rubbish. I am not listening with the ears, nor the brain. When the whole heart has become the total hearing instrument, there action takes place.

Secondly, you will discover that all these things arise in what you call the personality. One must inquire into the nature of that personality. Is there a thing called personality? You can call it jiva, atma, or soul, but is there a thing called soul or personality which sits there and puts on some kind of a dress called 'mind'? Does the personality or the responder to life's situations arise a million times a day? Maybe this is the truth.

Who responds to 'I see him'? When I say, 'He is my friend, I like him', or 'I hate him', who says this? Me. Who is the 'me'? Is the 'me' a sort of crystallized being, or is it merely a memory? For instance, he insulted me 10 days ago. When I see him again, that memory responds to this present situation. There is no personality at all.

Can I also see that it is not an entity called the jiva nor the soul that does all this, but merely the memory. As long as this memory pattern continues to exist in me, whatever or whosoever might touch me, and whatever kind of discourse I might listen to, it falls flat. It does not touch it at all. The memory continues and the new instruction also comes in and mingles with it, creating muck. This also forms another piece of memory. What you hear and what you have read, all continue to form other memories in you, and the emotions that arise deeper from within from past memories, continue to arise.

There is a beautiful confusion in which all of us swim. That is - what you hear now, your past memories, all your anxieties, fear and hate, are all registered as memory. These go on joyously, blissfully, without ever affecting you, without ever allowing an improvement to take place. This must be very clearly understood. How I get rid of them, We will deal with next week.

A Stilled Mind

Anxiety, fear and other emotions are in me, not outside. They arise in me, in my mind or in my heart - I do not know where. As soon as these emotions arise, the first thing they do is to confuse me completely and thoroughly. This is something very important to remember. When I become angry, for instance, my mind is thoroughly confused and agitated. It is not steady, or calm. It is very difficult for me at that time to learn anything. You can go on telling me to observe this anger, but - how do I observe it when I am angry?

First of all, I must realise that these thing arise within me. What that expression 'within me' means, I do not now. Secondly, I must also realise that it is next to impossible for me to watch how these things happen as and when they are happening. I am not in a mood to do that when my whole mind is churned and agitated.

It is possible to learn how to observe oneself, how to observe the mind, and how to see what is going on within with this simple exercise. If you are able to transplant the whole exercise within yourself and train yourself to observe the mind when you are not angry, then it is possible to stop anger from arising when it is just in a state of ripples. It is then possible to overcome anxiety when there is only a slight sensation of anxiety. It is also possible to observe hate and eliminate it almost before it arises, or as it arises, not afterwards.

So I can learn a simple technique and thus train myself to observe the mind in its various changing moods. If that can be done, then it has to be done almost constantly - constantly and vigilantly observing oneself when there is a little bit of agitation in the mind, so you can see it coming. Then you can completely and totally eliminate fear, anxiety, greed, anger, jealousy, and attachment or infatuation, which we call love.

The technique is simple: I have a candle here and I am looking at it steadily and simply. I think it is easy for all of us to realise that the mind - or whatever it is within us - is not looking at the flame of this candle. We all know that the flame is reflected on the retina upside down, that the optic nerve carries the impression to the brain centre and so on, and the action takes place there. So, the visual centre of the brain is looking at the retina, not at the candle. The image of the candle flame is formed on the retina, so that seeing takes place within me. Is that clear?

Where do I see the candle? Where does this expression, 'this is a flame' arise in me? Where does the thought 'I see the candle' occur? If I did not know the word 'candle' or the word 'light' what would I see now? There is a funny looking object sitting in front of me. Where does that word 'candle' arise? When you observe that, the mind becomes still. When you ask yourself this simple question, the mind becomes absolutely still. Then the mind is still and when you have learned to observe the still mind, you have learned to observe the arising of the next thought or emotion. This is an extremely simple thing. If you do not want to use a

candle you can use a symbol, a flower, a statue or something divine - or whatever the mind likes. To learn to observe it, and to learn to observe the action within is the essence.

The action takes place within. I see the candle or whatever I have chosen. That is - a thought arises in the mind which says that this is a candle or a flower etc. Where does that thought arise? I can almost visualise this thought form in the mind without even looking at it. What is that made of? And where does it arise? Does it arise in my head, in my heart, in my abdomen or my toes?

There, one must be absolutely child like in one's curiosity. That is - I should not accept an answer which my anatomy book or psychology book provides. I want to know first-hand, not through the medium of a book. I want to know immediately where this action of seeing and this action of thinking 'It is a candle' happens, and that is thinking. Immediately the mind becomes still. In that still mind, perception takes place, understanding takes place. The still mind, or the mind whose energies and powers are all concentrated, is a very powerful mind.

I have learned this. Now he says something insulting, and there is a situation in which normally you would expect me to explode. I look at him. My eyes look at him, but my attention is not externalised, it is turned inward. I see the disturbance begin to happen. Why should I get angry? Or, why should I become afraid or anxious? Why should I be jealous, why should I allow this beautiful inward peace to be disturbed?

If I can do that, my whole life becomes a meditation. Meditation is not something which I do only in the morning or in the evening. In the morning and evening I might use a candle or some sacred object to train myself, but really and truly, my whole life becomes meditation. Such a life is sacred, such a life is beautiful, such a life is a blessing to oneself and to everyone in the world.

Baba Muktananda

In the Yoga Vasistha, 'Guru' is defined as one who is able to arouse God-consciousness - or give an intimation of God-consciousness - in someone else, either by merely looking, by touching, or by talking. The Guru shows the path, the path is opened up and kept open by the Guru. We might have God-consciousness as a permanent feature or as a passing feature, but only he who is able to awaken this is the Guru.

How does it happen and why does it not happen to everybody, everywhere? Obviously, Bhagavan Nityananda and Swami Sivananda traveled and met millions of people. Why did not everybody's shakti get awakened? Why did not everyone experience God-consciousness? The answer to this question is simple - a thing will catch fire only if it is flammable, only if it is ready. They have a simple and beautiful example for this. If you have a whole lot of cotton soaked in petrol, even if you light a match in the vicinity, the cotton catches fire. This is like a very highly prepared adhikari - student. In his case, the Guru may not even look at him, but by merely thinking of the Guru, suddenly he has Shaktipat. That is possible. If you are highly prepared and ready - in other words, you are almost burning, all that is needed is just one spark, which a Siddha Guru like Baba Muktananda can transmit from a great distance, because there is no distance. Distance is only for the physical being, and Baba Muktananda says that the Guru is not restricted to the pysical being.

The second class of student is probably like most of us, comparable to the charcoal. You set it alight, fan it a little bit, and once it catches fire, it is fairly safe - if there is no rain, and something elso does not happen. So it needs a little bit of personal touch. You have to touch the charcoal, set it alight and then watch. When it goes down, fan it a little, and when there is likelihood of the pieces of charcoal getting wet, cover it with a canopy. Then it is safe. That is like most of us - we need a little bit of effort on the part of both the disciple and the Guru. I have to put forward some effort to keep myself dry and flammable and not get wet, and my Guru must also come close to me, set me alight and perhaps keep fanning the flame by repeating His instructions again and again and again, so that one day I really blaze.

The third class of student is comparable to a banana stem. It is not possible to set a banana skin alight with a matchstick, it is difficult to set it alight even with a flaming torch. You may have to get a whole fire going, and then throw the banana a stem on it. Very often the banana stem will put the fire out. If a Guru Who is not powerful enough attempts to set alight the banana stem, it is quite possible He himself will be put out. These are the three categories of disciples.

Whether the Shaktipat happens or not depends very much upon the seeker and the guru. The guru's role is not to be minimized, because even if that highly flammable cotton soaked in petrol is kept near the canal, it will not catch fire - water cannot transmit fire. These two are equally important - the student must be

highly flammable and the guru must be capable of igniting. When these two come together, then Shaktipat happens.

Shaktipat is transmission. When is such transmission possible? What do I do in order to prepare myself? What does that well-soaked cotton do? In a way, it loses its personality -- cotton is not cotton anymore, it is a bomb. Can this personality be so completely emptied that the personality itself is not there, 'I' is not there? It is the 'I' that acts as an obstruction, a barrier, to the Grace of the Guru. The whole of me can be taken over and set aflame only if there is no obstruction at all. When, for instance, two compartments separated by a barrier are filled with cotton soaked in petrol, if you set one piece of cotton alight, the flame will not pass through that steel compartment and burn the other piece of cotton. So, if there is a barrier in me - which is 'I', 'me', the ego, then it is possible for the Guru's Grace to come in, do something, and then be blocked and not go any further. A whole compartment of my personality is completely and totally untouched.

So, it is possible for people either to be only emotionally responsive to the Guru, or only intellectually responsive to the Guru. I have seen both - people who are intellectually in love with the Guru, who can give a talk about what a marvelous person the Guru is and write books on Him and so on - but except for the intellectual third of that person's being, the rest is cold, lifeless and untouched.

Then there are those who are emotional and sentimental. In them it is only the emotional being that is touched by the Guru - the intellect is cold and their life is completely impermeable and untouched. Here also it is possible to go around proclaiming 'My guru is God', and if someone asks rationally, 'Can you explain to me why you think your Guru is God?', they will fight, because it is only the emotion that responds, the upstairs - intellect - is vacant, empty. They do not know what it is all about, but feel 'My Guru is great, my Guru is God'. This is a fairly childish emotional response.

When a person who has a strong ego approaches a Guru, even though one compartment of his personality may appear to be responsive and the Guru may be able to transmit to this part, there is still a barrier, and that barrier effectively stops any real transformation or transmutation from taking place. If none of the aspects of your personality is responsive, you can go to the greatest Guru and come away disappointed. Why is it so? Because the whole personality is closed - neither the intellect, nor the emotion, nor your life responds.

On the other hand, if the intellect responds, you are intellectually convinced of the greatness of the Guru, but that intellect has no power, no strength, no energy. Energy comes from emotion. Since the emotion is not there, there is no sustaining power. So, we stay with a master for a few days and come back and write a novel about it. Or if your intellect does not respond, either because it is not convinced or because you are so dull, then you get emotionally caught up and you become fanatical. Fanatics have a lot of emotion and practically no

intelligence, and their life is not touched at all by the Guru's Grace.

If I go to the guru, I must also be prepared, and the preparation is essentially the complete and total absence of all inner barriers. Though I am using the plural - inner barriers, it is really one barrier which seems to slip from one stage to the other. The barrier is the ego. What other barrier do I have? At one stage it says, 'Well, you know, I realise it is something tremendously profound, but it is irrational, it does not satisfy me, I am not impressed by it'. Who are you to be impressed by it? Or, one might say, 'All this is very good for them, not me'. Probably any statement you will find is a modification of the 'me'. It does not impress 'me'. It is not for 'me'. It does not appeal to 'me'. It is always to 'me'. So, I must become aware that it is the 'me' - I am the one that is resisting and unresponsive. If the 'me' is seen to be the barrier, where are you? You are outside of it, looking at it. It means you are away from it. In that intelligence there no barrier, and that intelligence is able to respond to the Guru. It is beyond the intellect, it is beyond emotion, it is the total life itself.

Guru has been defined already as the one who is able to awaken God-consciousness. If the total life stream is able to respond to such a Guru, then there is no problem at all. The inner awakening takes place. When the inner awakening takes place, what happens from there on is not your business either. Because, if then the ego jumps again, 'Ah, I have had Shaktipat, I have got this', it means that the ego had only been suspended, put under anaesthetic - and suddenly it wakes up and has become more vicious than before. You have slipped behind the barrier again. You came out of the barrier and received the Grace, and then suddenly you slipped behind the barrier again. The Grace is not lost, the Grace is still there - but you are lost.

So, whatever happens from there on, Baba Muktananda insists, is done by the Shakti. What does that imply? It is a beautiful thing if one can get into the spirit of it. From that moment when I have found my Guru and I have received Grace, whatever happens is Grace. So, there is only an inevitable result, I have nothing to boast about. Whatever is done, is done by Grace; and whatever happens, happens through Grace. If I lost a limb, that is Grace; if I run into an accident, that is Grace; if I lose my eyesight, it is Grace; if I lose my business, it is Grace; if my wife runs away, it is Grace; if my children die, it is also Grace. Whatever happens is Grace. If I enter into samadhi and stay there for ten days, it is Grace - not me. It is not me, because the 'me' does not come up. There is no 'me', there is no need to resurrect it at all. It is finished.

From then on, it is possible for one to experience inwardly what would have been considered disastrous before. What would have been considered loss to the personal self before, is not experienced at all as such now. Because there is no personal self. If my house collapses when I am lying dead outside, I do not cry. Why? Because 'I' is not there. When the 'I' is not there, no loss is experienced, no loss is felt as a loss. If that is clear, then there is no loss of Grace at all. Grace is never lost. When the 'I' wakes up, when the ego wakes up, it is lost to Grace - the

Grace is never lost.

Whatever the Grace does within oneself or outside of oneself is only bliss. It is not experienced as joy, nor as something which I have, e.g. 'I am happy'. Grace is not interested in making you happy, it is a prostitution of Grace. Grace is not interested in making you prosperous. Prosperity might come - it is due to Grace; adversity might come - it is also due to Grace.

So, once the seeker has experienced Grace, he realises that everything that happens from there on is Grace, nothing else but Guru's Grace - whatever happens. The distinction that 'this is good, this is bad', 'this is prosperity, this is adversity', 'this is honour, this is dishonour', 'this is success and this is failure', exists only in the light - or shadow - of the 'me'. Water flows from one pot to the other - there is no loss, it is only water moving from one spot on earth to another spot on earth. It is only as long as the individual personality functions as the 'me' that there is experience of failure, loss, dishonour - otherwise these things do not exist.

If that is borne in mind, then the inner awakening is brought about smoothly and beautifully. From there on there is no obstacle at all, there is no struggle at all, there is no problem at all. The Grace functions smoothly till even the possibility of individuality comes to an end. When is that possible? When the body drops. As long as the body continues to live, it is possible for this living organism to throw up the thing called 'me', the ego. If one is able to sustain this attitude till the time the body drops, then one is freed. That is the whole essence of Shaktipat.

Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami - The Living Truth.

It was a great blessing to have been in the presence of Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami. It is almost unbelievable that some of us met him about six months ago in Rishikeh, and now he is no more. I remember the last conversation we had. We had been in the same train from Delhi going to Rishikesh. His frail body had to be carried in a special chair. But at Rishikesh, when it was mentioned him that while the body was so frail, yet he was so active, he told us that the main qualification of a devotee of Krishna - is the realisation 'I am not the body'. If you are committed to the feeling that you are the body, you are a devotee of the body and not of Krishna.

It is one thing to hear these lovely thoughts and expressions and another thing to hear the same words from one who lives the truth. It is the truth. It is the divine that speaks, not the human body, the personality. There is a tremendous difference here. The words are the same, and I have heard such words in thousands of discourses by swamis and read them in a thousand books. But when the same words come from the mouth of an enlightened person then you see the truth, you do not merely hear it. You see it with the eyes of your heart, not with the mind. That was an extraordinary experience.

Another important and beautiful factor in Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami was his total and utter dedication. Therefore, this wonderful man did not have time to retire. He commenced his active life when all of us go into retirement. He was active to the last moment. I have only seen one other person of the same spirit of dedication, and that was Gurudev Sri Sivananda. He too was dynamic till the last moment. This is only possible if there is a direct realisation that it is the divine spirit and not the body that is active. It is the body that demands rest, retirement, not the spirit. The spirit is never weak, it grows stronger and stronger.

A further similarity between Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami and Gurudev Swami Sivananda was their devotion to the Mahamantra. There was no celebration in the ashram where Gurudev did not sing 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna'. In Rishikesh, the Mahamantra has been sung for 24 hours every day since 1943. Gurudev liked it very much. It occurs in the Kalisantarana Upanishad, where it is said that in the kali yuga, when people lack the intelligence to understand vedantic truth and the taste for spiritual practice, the repetition of Gods Name is the only way in which the mind gets purified. Gurudev took the Lords Name all over India, and Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami spread it throughout the whole world.

Another important feature, common to both Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami and Gurudev Sivananda is their insistence on self-discipline as an important corollary to this Nama Kirtan. Even in India some people think it does not matter what you do, as long as you sing 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna'. If the Name of God effaces all your sins, why do you still go on sinning. Here are two spiritual giants who insist on singing 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna', but add that - one must also

lead a disciplined life. Without self-discipline, to say, 'I am a yogi', sounds hollow. To claim that one is a great yogi while leading an undisciplined life seems contradictory. Both Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta Swami and Gurudev Sivananda insisted and emphasised that if you are to be a true devotee of the Lord, and if you are sincere in your chanting of Nama Kirtan, then self-discipline must become natural.

Because it is not always possible for self-discipline to come from the self, the Guru stresses that you must practise this discipline, and he also suggests this discipline must be made your own. Do not think that the Guru will always be there to catch you by the ear to pull you onto to the right path. Discipline must be aplied by you. If it is not, you are the loser, not the Guru. The spirit does not die. It is separated from the body, but it is still there. The great ones do not go away - they abandon their body. Even while they were alive, they had consciously withdrawn their consciousness from the body. No, they do not die. They are here with us to help us, to guide us. The best way to find them and to benefit from their unseen presence is to translate their teaching into our daily living. They are with us now.

Sai Baba

Sri Gurudev Swami Sivananda also used to celebrate His own birthday. He used to take a keen interest in it, because it was yet another occasion when people could meet together and think of something other than the daily routine of life, a time when they could tune their thoughts to something nobler and higher than eating, drinking and sleeping, when they could reconsider their life and think of God. Gurudev used to sing, 'Is there not a nobler mission in life than to eat, drink, sleep?' This is what we do every day. But there is something else to do.

Sai Baba has also been to Gurudev's ashram where He spent about 7 days - I was there at the time and had His Darshan every day. He spoke at every satsang, each day giving us His message. I have had His Darshan several times since then. His upadesha instruction was beautifully summed up yesterday in the TV-program for the occasion. That message is the universal message, which has been delivered again and again by great mahatmas, paramahatmas, avatars of God, or just great beings, whatever we call them. It has naturally been adapted by each master to suit his own genius and the capacity of his audience.

The message given by Sai Baba 25 years ago in Gurudev's ashram in Rishikesh and delivered repeatedly by the saints and sages throughout the world, has also been put very simply by Shankaracharya - 'God alone is Truth. God alone is Real.' That what we see or consider to be the world is an illusion. We do not see the reality. There is something there, but what we see is illusion. Is all I see therefore useless and a taste? Shall I go into a perpetual depression over this? No. Because what we call the living soul in us, i.e. the jiva, the atma, is none other than God.

How do I realise this? How does this Truth become as real as this building, this microphone? The sadhana for this is remembrance of God, kirtan, japa, charity, goodness, right conduct, right living. Some of these great sages performed what are normally considered as miracles.

When Sai Baba was in Rishikesh, there was a discussion about what is a miracle and why do great men perform them? Baba does not tire of telling us that He performs miracles to promote faith and devotion., to inspire confidence and to turn people's minds to God. Since the vital factor is to turn the mind towards God, whatever these saves do is meant to achieve that aim. Anything else is a waste of time. To turn the mind Godward is the greatest miracle. If the heart can somehow give up its egotistic activity, running after vanity, and turn to God, this is the greatest miracle that sages can perform.

Gurudev was very fond of kirtan. He was one of the first swamis belonging to Shankaracharya's order to break with tradition and start singing 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna' etc. Before that, it was not very fashionable for swamis to sing. Swamis gave inspiring lectures on Vedanta, gave upadesha, darshan, etc., but Swami Sivananda was the first to start singing and dancing on public platforms.

On the All India Tour, He began and ended all talks with kirtan, and He weaved messages and instructions into the songs. For example, He sang, 'Eat a little, drink a little' in between 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna', or, 'God is Truth - Govinda, Meditate - Govinda, Do not drink - Govinda, Do not smoke - Govinda, Do not tell lies - Govinda.' A long sentence was split into two. 'Do not utter - Govinda, harsh words - Govinda.' When He was lecturing to a crowd of students and sang, 'Do not study - Govinda, Herbert Spencer and atheistic books - Govinda,' everyone clapped their hands after the 'Do not study.' People will consider the order not to smoke, but the 'Do not study' injunction they are ready to obey.

Gurudev also said that just as a doctor prescribing a remedy for an illness will add dietary and other restrictions etc. to enable the medicine to work better, there is also a regime to be followed in kirtan singing. If the prescribed rules are not obeyed, the medicine will not be effective. Similarly, for sankirtan to be effective, some injunctions must be followed.

If you go on repeating 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna' parrot fashion, it will not lead you anywhere. The beggars who go around villages singing God's Name all day long do not have their mind on Narayana but on your pocket. However much they sing 'Narayana', they will still be beggars materially and spiritually.

Chaitanya Nahaprabhu in an ancient text, has given the prescription for effective repetition of God's Name. Anyone can say God's Name, but it is only efficacious in the case of one who is humbler than a blade of grass. The particular grass alluded to here is Kusa grass which grows better when trodden upon. Grass is always under your feet, but this type of grass grows better when it is crushed. Another qualification is forbearance - to be forbearing like a tree. The reference here is to a special type of tree'- sandalwood, which gives you its fragrance when you cut it down and grind it. Can you too give out a fragrance after you have been cut down and ground? Can you be like one who says when you point a pistol at him, 'Welcome! Do your job, I have mine to do. I do not want to interfere with whatever you have to do.' Finally, one who is totally free from vanity and who gives honour to everyone also has the right qualification for singing God's Name.

If these four qualities are found in you, then the repetition of kirtan will be fruitful, because the ego, which stands as a barrier between you and the Supreme, is pulled down. Gurudev said, as have Sai Baba and others, that in this Kali Yuga, Bhakti Yoga is easy. But it is only easy on the surface. It is not just sitting and singing kirtans, or picking flowers and throwing them on statues. You cannot create flowers, but you merely pick them, and having committed this robbery you ask God for a blessing. We do all that in the name of bhakti.

What is Bhakti? The word bhakti actually means division as well as unity. There is a feeling, a consciousness in me that you and I are two different beings. These is a feeling that I am something different, distinct from the omnipresent God. Can this feeling that I am an individual go? Where is this division in me? I feel there is this division. This must go, the egoism must be dropped, then there is oneness.

The same is true of devotion to the Guru. We sing His Name, worship Him, but are we prepared to do what He says? It is easy to bathe His feet with milk, that is only one third. Dhyana mulam is also not difficult, but mantra mulam is more difficult. Whatever the Guru says must be adopted, practised as mantra. Can I regard every word of the Guru as mantra? Then there is an inner transformation. In that respect there is no difference between Isvara and Guru.

Only he who is totally devoted to God and equally devoted to the Guru can understand these Upanishadic truths. It seems impossible. You cannot be totally devoted to two different things. There are no two fulnesses. But there is no difference between these two - God and Guru. If you are totally devoted to the Guru, to God, it is possible for the Truth, Vedanta to be understood, and for enlightenment to take place. That inner transformation will take place without much effort.

A talk given to a class of hatha yoga students

It is important to understand what is really meant by hatha yoga, before we can discuss in what manner it can benefit us in our own daily life. Hatha yoga is not merely a system of physical culture or gymnastics. In a way it has a totally different approach to even what is called the physical body. The hatha yogi does not treat the body as a physical thing. He is not interested in the figure. The hatha yogi is interested in health.

His definition of health though is quite different. In the English language, the word 'health' comes from the same root as the words 'heal', 'whole' and 'holiness'. All three are similar. Healing means to bring about wholeness. There is wholeness, but somehow something has interfered with that wholeness. The removal of that interference restores the wholeness.

That is why, if the spirit of yoga is understood and practised with the right spirit and attitude, it is possible to see that its influence is felt, not merely by the physical body, but by the mind and the spirit. Yoga does not treat body, mind and spirit as three distinct and different categories, but as one.

Therefore, yoga looks at that which makes both the physical body and the mind function prana. You cannot define prana, much less demonstrate what it means. It is not just breathing exercises. Breathing is made possible by prana, as is eating and speaking, but prana is different from all these. Therefore, it is not possible to either define it or demonstrate it. Hatha yoga deals directly with this prana.

Prana is what makes the body live and the mind think. It is of the substance of the spirit. So, the yogi, by approaching this prana and working with it, is able to bring about health - not physical health or mental health or spiritual health, but all three together. So, to the hatha yogi, physical health is only a by-product. His body will age and decay, but there is a sense of wholeness, of well-being. It is quite different from what we usually regard as health, i.e. a man can be healthy even although a doctor says he has high blood pressure.

I am reminded of my guru Swami Sivananda. Even when His body was considered ill, there was a radiance on His face which was extraordinary. That is what we would call health or a sense of well being. Then the prana functions correctly, the physical body also functions efficiently, the mind functions efficiently, and the spirit is alive.

How does the yogi achieve this wholeness? It is not really an achievement, because the wholeness is already there. The yogi does not introduce something from outside. There was some interference and that is merely removed. Wholeness is already inside, and that wholeness is revealed by removing the obstructions to it. The restoration of this wholeness is the goal of yoga. In its practice, it involves all aspects, all the parts of this whole. If you neglect one aspect, you are not practising yoga, but gymnastics.

The yogi goes step by step, dealing first with the body. Even there he does not treat it as a body, but as one of the functions of this life-force or the spirit. The body is not worth anything in itself, but as one of the functions of this life-force, as the abode of the spirit, as a temple of God, it is worth a lot. As an abode of the spirit, it is marvellous; as a piece of flesh, it is stinking. The moment you enter into this spirit there is a tremendous change. Strangely enough, you are instantly relaxed. You are not interested in sustaining and keeping this body, but you see it as an abode of the spirit, as a manifestation of the life-force. You watch the way your own body moves, and suddenly begin to discover the wonder that this human body really is. For instance, I can rotate my shoulders right round, but not my neck. It takes a duck to do that. Immediately I begin to discover that there is a tremendous intelligence in the body.

What we call prana or the life force, is also intelligence. It is not a mechanical thing, like electricity. For instance, if you have a fuse which can take a certain load, and you increase the load suddenly, the fuse blows out. Your body does not do that. Try holding a bucket under running water. As the water pours into the bucket, it becomes heavier and heavier. Watch your arm. It keeps on tensing to make itself strong, exactly to the extent that is needed. It is an intelligence which is fantastic. It is that intelligence which the yogi looks at.

As you do the yoga postures, this is the secret. All my attention is within, trying to watch. The postures are not done mechanically, because I am not a machine. As I go on bending, the bending happens, the posture happens. I do not push myself. The intelligence within, which is the life force, is able to figure out from moment to moment how much tension is necessary and where, how much relaxation is necessary and where. That is the discovery of health.

When you do yoga postures in that spirit, you are practising yoga. You suddenly realise that, at that point where you discover the life force, the distinction between body and mind disappears. At that moment, you see - not merely because the swami or somebody else has told you, that this tremendous intelligence called prana is able to redress any problem, adjust itself to any situation instantly. You also realise that it is almost impossible to hurt yourself. You may or may not be very supple, but as you get into a posture, you see what the body can do. Only if the will pushes the body a little further is there damage. The intelligence within is able to restrain you from doing it.

People often wonder if there is any danger in doing hatha yoga. I am breathing all the time and the yogi merely says, please breathe a little more deeply and better. If breathing does not kill me, why should breathing better be harmful? There is absolutely no danger at all. The intelligence or the prana tells the body, 'Thus far you can go and d no further. Stop.' No one need tell me that while sitting straight I should not turn my neck right round and look backwards. Where is the sense in telling me it is dangerous? I cannot do it.

Hatha yoga enables me to discover my owm potentialities, someone else's potentialities; so, there is no competition or comparison here. But I am not going to remain idle. I am living and, as I go on living, I reach out further in this self-discovery. More and more layers of potentiality that might have remained latent become apparent. In all this, the mind is calm, very alert and intelligent; for, if that intelligence is not there, you are going to miss it.

For one who practises yoga intelligently there is no danger at all, because the mind is observant, and the mind that observes the physical movements in hatha yoga is also devout. This is very important to remember. This is not my body, it was created by somebody else. I cannot change my body by thinking, but I can observe the movement of this body. I learn to observe it in the practice of hatha yoga, and then that becomes natural to me. Then I can observe it while working, eating, falling asleep, everywhere, otherwise it is not yoga. I suddenly realise that even this body is not mine. I did not produce it. I could not have made it at all. I see that it is the temple of the spirit. When I see that, my heart is full of devotion.

Yoga is not a religion in itself. It is not without religion, but it is the spirit of religion. It is not a cult, independent of Christianity, Islam or Hinduisn, but it can awaken in me the spirit of religion. The secretary-general in the Vatican put it very beautifully when he said, 'It is like a road. On that road you can drive a car, a bus, a truck, or you can walk. You can do anything you like on the road, but it is that road which is important.' Yoga is that road. It is the spirit of religion which ban be integrated into all religions, which makes all religions meaningfull.

When I see that this body itself is holy ground, my attitude undergoes a radical change. I treat it with great respect. I am careful with what I put into it, I am observing what come. out of it. So, one is watchful of one's food habits, living habits. I cultivate this inner awareness of what goes on, awareness of the simple truth that the body is not material, not merely flesh, but that there is something else in it. From there on your whole life undergoes a radical and wonderful change. The life force or energy that is latent in you is suddenly released. Your inhibitions and your ambitions, your fears and whatever it was which acted as an obstruction, are all removed, and there is a tremendous flow of energy and also a tremendous upliftment of the spirit. That is yoga. Who knows that, knows how to live during the rest of the day in the same spirit of self discovery.

Prana

It is important to look at the word pranayama and see what it means. Pranayama is development or control of the life force, which enables the body and mind to function. In order to develop the life force, one must understand what it is and how it functions. If that understanding is not there, then I can go holding my nostrils or doing something else for centuries. As brahmin boys we were supposed to do this pranayama before saying prayers. It was a routine which we were taught by the pundits. Pranayama is also associated with some mantras. The pundit wanted to make sure that we repeated the mantra correctly, so we held the nostrils and then exhaled while saying the mantra aloud. There is no pranayama in that. It is called pranayama, but you do not do anything with the prana.

If I understand what prana means and how it works, then I may be able to exercise it, control it. But prana cannot be understood, neither can it be intellectualised or conceptualised. If it is conceptualised, then you are hanging on to a concept, not prana.

So, what is prana? Prana is the energy and the life that keeps this body and mind functioning. How do I understand it? How do I come face to face with it as it were? How do I discover it? When these questions are asked, the teachers slip into three groups.

If you see a starfish on the seabed and you want to find out whether it is there, or whether it is merely an impression left in the sand by the starfish, there are three ways of finding out. Someone is going to say kick it, tickle it, and it is bound to show up if it is there. Someone else may say, merely gait and watch, while a third person might suggest disturbing the water around the starfish to see if it starts moving. If it does not move at all from morning until evening, you can be sure that it was only an impression. If you kick it, it is likely to respond immediately. But if it is not a starfish, if it is something else, you are in trouble. And if you disturb the water around the starfish, it is possible that your view will be distracted or perverted. These three approaches correspond exactly to this pranayama.

The jnani of the Ramana Naharshi school suggested a very simple method. As long as your thought tries to understand what life force or prana means, it can only understand the concept. Thought will generate a concept and cling to it; that is mind trying to understand the mind. When the question 'what is prana?' is asked by the mind, the mind tries to understand the mind, the mind tries to understand the prana. So, it creates a concept called prana and goes on looking at it. This is no good.

The mind has to be absolutely quiet, without a ripple on it. You have to look directly within, looking without a subject, looking without creating an observer, looking without a subject and therefore without an object. If that is done, according to the jnana yogis of Ramana Naharshi's school, the suspension of

mental activity itself restrains or does something to this prana and enables it to manifest in its own purity.

There is a snag in this. You do not enjoy the satisfaction of having experienced it. I cannot come out and tell everybody, 'prana is like this, it's red and blue and it functions in this way, it is so powerful.' No such thing is possible because, in that discovery, mental activity is suspended and there is nobody to experience it in a subject or object relationship.

According to the jnana yogis though, it is a sure way to meditate; not even to meditate upon something, for here the initial object of meditation or the focal point is prana. Initially there is a division. I am meditating upon that, 'I' being the subject and this being the object. But when the meditation becomes intense or real, then the division is abolished, the space is gone. And when the space is gone, there is no 'I am contemplating prana.' There is pure observation, pure experiencing and there is no subject-object division. Therefore there is no 'I know what prana is.'

That is like the man who suggested that you stand absolutely still without disturbing the water, to watch and see if the starfish moves. The critic may say, 'how do you know that you are doing meditation in the right way?' You may be sitting and sleeping and not doing anything at all. You may think you are contemplating, but you are still clinging to your old notion of prana. It is a waste of time. Similarly with the starfish, you may find that there is nothing to discover. You may watch from morning until evening only to discover that there is no starfish, but only its impression left in the sand. This is the counter argument or criticism.

The other extreme is to kick the starfish immediately. I can know immediately. That is the hatha yoga method. Hatha yoga itself has somehow come to mean use of will power, which a means a certain amount of violence. This is mentioned in the Yoga Vasistha in one or two places. 'He adopted a certain method, not the violent method of hatha yoga.' The hatha yogis say, strain yourself in such a way that you challenge prana, you kick it, arouse it. The hatha yogi does this by using several drastic methods. In whichever way the prana functions, there he challenges it. When prana functions as breathing, he challenges it there. Stop breathing for as long as possible. Do you know how long it is possible for you to hold your breath? You do not because, if you hold your breath for one or two minutes, you start to panic and let the breath go. How do you know that you could not have held the breath for 10 seconds more? When can you really satisfy yourself that you have held your breath for as long as possible? When you are knocked unconscious. So, this is the attitude of the hatha yogis. Hold your breath until you are knocked unconscious. This is challenging it.

In the same way prana functions as the gastric fire, the digestive fire. There is hunger, thirst, digestion and elimination. The hatha yogi challenges it there. Fast for as long as possible. When do you know that it is not possible anymore? When

you die. You must go to the limits. Prana functions as physical movement. So the hatha yogis say, stand still for as long as possible, or stand on your head for as long as possible. Everything must be taken to the extreme. In the same way, the prana functions as thought. Suppress that thought.

One of the functions of prana, according to the hatha yogi, is blinking. There is one upaprana which does the blinking. The hatha yogi says, do not do it. Stare at something and say, I will not blink. In this manner, in all these different ways, rouse the prana, challenging it, suppressing its activity. Then, according to their theory, the prana will come out and say, I am prana, come on blink. Or, I am prana, breathe, I am prana, think, or eat. But until then you must go on.

This is a fairly drastic method, but the hatha yogi's argument is that there is nothing to be afraid of. It is drastic, but it is sure and scientific. The moment you kick the starfish, you will discover whether it is alive or dead, whether it is a real starfish or only an impression. You will know immediately. There is no waste of time, no guesswork. The hatha yogi also argues, what are you afraid of, sickness or death? These come to you even then you do not practise hatha yoga. The opposite view is that if you practise hatha yoga and if something goes wrong or you are not practising properly, you may become sick or even die. The hatha yogi says, what on earth are you talking about? These people will get sick even if they do not practise hatha yoga, and in any case they are destined to die. So, what are you afraid of? There is no sense in being afraid of the inevitable. This is the point of view of the hatha yogis.

In raja yoga there is a certain middle path, but because I am saying it is a middle path, do not think that it is therefore glorious. The raja yogis say, disturb the water around the starfish and see. Do not disturb the starfish, for it might hurt you or something else may happen. But disturb the water around and it is possible that you may discover what it is. In the same way, do not disturb the prana directly.

So, the raja yogis suggested a number of methods. You practise yama, you practise niyama, you practise some exercises called pranayama. Though Patanjali specifically mentions in one of his yoga sutras, exhale and hold, he does not say for how long. That is left to your discretion. The sutra also mentions certain other pranayama practises which involve inhalation, retention, and exhalation. It is suggested that they be practised, though almost as a graduated process in various degrees and different length's of time. It is suggested, try this, and if at the same time you are able to focus your mind upon the source of prana, you may be able to discover what prana is.

This is like beating about the bush. You are neither adopting the jnani's attitude nor the hatha yogi's attitude, but a combination of both these. The difficulty here is that you have to be watchful, to see if you are really dealing with this prana. When you are so intensely involved in practising yama, niyama, asanas, and all sorts of things, you have got too many things on your plate.

So, according to the hatha yogi or the jnana yogi it may not be all that simple to discover prana through the raja yoga method. The jnana yogi says you are too active to discover what this prana is, and the hatha yogi says you are too inactive, too passive to discover what prana is. The raja yogi says, alright, I may not be as dynamic or aggressive as the hatha yogi is, and I may not be as passive and actively observant as the jnana yogi is, but I am doing it in a way that satisfies both the activity and the passivity. That is the raja yoga approach to pranayama.

I think one thing here becomes clear. Except in a strange way, one cannot really know what prana is, because the energy that informs the knower is prana. Informs, not in the sense of coming and telling you, but in the sense that the form is within. Bread is made of dough, dough informs bread. The energy that informs this understanding of prana is itself prana, and therefore there is no objective knowledge of prana.

Some people say that prana has this colour, that it is like this thing, that they have had a glimpse of something and they are giving expression to that something in their own way. This is all relative, relative to their own ego. I think a relative could be very pleasant or very unpleasant, honest or dishonest. In the same way, knowledge that is relative could be pleasant or unpleasant, honest or dishonest. It is only relative knowledge that I have seen prana as green or red. It is relative knowledge, pleasant and unpleasant, honest and dishonest, because it filters through the mind, the ego.

However, if one's awareness, one's consciousness pursues this quest, it can arrive at a knowledge in which there is no division, a knowledge which is of a different type, a different quality. This understanding is pure understanding, vaguely comparable to the statement 'I am alive.' In that statement 'I am alive', there is an awareness, but it is not an objective awareness. If you are asked, 'are you alive or dead?', you do not put your hand on your chest and say, 'yes, the heart is still beating. I am alive.' You know it. You do not know it as an objective reality, but you know it. That knowledge is quite different. The yogi who is able to arrive at that knowledge, arrives at it, not in the sense of an objective reality, but in the sense of knowledge itself.

How is this made possible? Because of the nature of consciousness. Consciousness being consciousness is always conscious of itself, not in an objective way, but in a different way. We do not even call it subjective. Ocean is always ocean and ocean is water, whereas you and I jump into it, hold it in our hands and say, 'ah, this is water.' But ocean is water. In a similar way, this consciousness being consciousness, is conscious all the time. In that consciousness, the awareness that this is prana might arise like a wave arises in the sea. It is not an awareness with a subject-object relationship, but clear and pure awareness - this is prana.

So, when it comes to practice, it seems best to combine at least these two points

of view. We exercise the breathing - breathing being one of the main activities of prana, and at the same time we observe what happens within the body while this breathing is being exercised. You are playing with this breathing, with the inhalation, exhalation, retention, suspension. While you are playing about with these movements as it were, prolonging them, suspending them, interrupting them, you are observing what goes on within yourself. If that is done, then pranayama is beautiful and fruitful.

In the same way it is possible to regulate one's eating habits. What is it that demands food? What is hunger? What is thirst? What happens if I do not eat, what happens if I eat something else, what happens if I fast? But this must not become a religious custom, a regulation or a rule. While I am fasting, I am watching, I am observing what goes on within. How does something jump up and down?

In the same way, the urge to blink, the urge to make physical movements are all activities of prana. There is a certain restlessness in the body. Where does that happen and how does it happen? I am watching to see how the impulse arises.

In the same way, when you do the yoga asanas, there is a disturbance of prana. Just as you disturb the water the starfish, so you are disturbing the limbs of the body trough which the prana moves, which are activated by the prana. There is a peripheral disturbance. Suddenly you assume a funny posture, a yoga posture, and the whole flow of prana is disturbed. You hold it for a few minutes until the disturbance subsides and balance is restored. In that process you will discover what prana means. You sit down for your meditation and observe the posture of the physical body, how it becomes restless after some time. The observation itself is able to cancel or control the restlessness.

You can also play with the mind in the same way. Without attacking its very source, just observe your thoughts. Why does this thought arise now, why not the other one? Why not a third one? Why should there be a succession of thoughts, why can it not be interrupted? Why should it go on 1,2,3,4,5? One could play with the thinking process in that way, deliberately cutting it and taking it somewhere else, and then you will discover the activity or prana. Talking is another activity of prana. As you go on talking, suddenly you stop. What makes me talk? Turn your speech the way you want or stop it. Observe silence. Try to interrupt a sentence and theon do not finish it. See what happens. As you go on speaking, saying something useless usually, cut that sentence into half and do not finish it.

These are all peripheral disturbances created in order to discover the activity of prana. Once this activity is discovered, it is possible that you will also discover the nature of prana. These are just some thoughts that might be helpful in our evening practice. We can practice deep breathing but not mechanically. Physiologically deep breathing is very good. Your lungs will improve, carbondioxide will be eliminated from the body, you will have a very nice body, a clear skin, no wrinkles etc. - but unfortunately you will die. And it is quite

possible that when you die, you will die a fool. So, is it possible, while not diminishing the physical value of deep breathing, to introduce the spiritual value? That is what we shall be doing during these talks.

Question&Answer

Question: Why is it important at all to discover this prana?

Swamiji: Let's think of Mauritius, not anywhere else. If there are 800,000 people here, it is possible that 1 person wants to discover it, the others do not bother. That's it. The same prana, at some stage, wants to attain this self-knowledge. Without understanding you cannot control it; understanding itself is control. The quest or impulse for self-knowledge arises in a person at some time or other, as the culminating point of the quest for knowledge. This quest for knowledge is in all of us, right from the time we were babies. You want to know something, I want to know something. As this quest for knowledge goes on in the life of a person, so the quest for self-knowledge arises at some point. I might call it a culminating point because, beyond that, there is nothing.

Question: It is not really something your ego does, it is something that happens to you then?

Swamiji: Yes. It should happen to me. But if it is suggested to me by others, and if I am persuaded to believe that self-knowledge will give me power, prestige, and so on, and if I engage myself in the quest for self-knowledge on the basis of such persuasion, it is not genuine.

Question: Swamiji, what about the gap method, where you do not interfere with the breathing at all. You just watch the breathing and try to remain aside from it and try to spot the gap between the in and the out breath.

Swamiji: That is you. The gap between the ingoing and the outgoing breath, or the outgoing and the incoming breath, that is you. There is no why. That is the reality. Observing it without an observer, that observation becomes aware of the incoming breath and outgoing breath and the middle. In the middle, the breath is suspended. Where the breath is suspended, the observation, not the observer, becomes aware of the impulse to take the next breath. That is the activity of prana. When one exhalation is completed, the observation which was observing this exhalation is tremendously alert. One exhalation is completed and the next inhalation is about to begin; that is the activity of prana.

Question: How to discourage the interference?

Swamiji: Interference is what was mentioned a minute ago, the ego.

Question: But the classical method tells us to find the gap?

Swamiji: These are words. We have to use words. How do I follow the breathing? I am the breathing, I am the breather. How do I follow it? I have to look. Here I am the breathing and I am the breath. I am the prana, I am the consciousness. To begin with, there is a division. I am breathing. 'I am eating' is already a division. Awareness, to begin with, was unaware of this breathing. When it is awakened and made to observe, to become aware of breathing, it looks as though it is following the breathing. But that should not continue for long, for then the awareness creates an image called prana and goes on forever. You are not following the breathing at all. So, awareness, having been aroused, suddenly becomes still, knowing that only in that stillness is clear observation possible. Then the awareness is not following it anymore, it is there as the bed of the ocean. The exhalation - inhalation-exhalation continues, and the awareness begins to follow the breathing. When the exhalation is completed the breath is suspended. The awareness exists looking everywhere for the arising of the next inhalation. It is not following the breath anymore. When the impulse to inhale is even vaguely formed, it says 'ah, that's it.' It is a beautiful exercise, but unfortunately it needs a calm mind. To some extent we need external peace also, otherwise it is not possible.

Question: Swamiji, if there is no objective or subjective experience of all this, how do these people come back and describe it?

Swamiji: They describe the last dream. You cannot describe sleep, but you can always describe the last dream. I am sitting for my meditation, but I am not meditating. I see that there is a thought now. Wipe that thought away and deliberately think of something else. Now push that away and think off something else. As a psychologist you know about the association of ideas, one thought leading on to another. If you can do that, you will find that at some point the mind relaxes, which is not what the meditator is after. The mind relaxes its own self control and then this free association takes over. Can you be vigilant then and cut that, prevent that from happening? I do not want free association, because in relation to meditation it is drifting, which is not going to lead to self-knowledge. The psychologists love this free association because it is like dreaming, and they love dreaming because it is like free association. This is just playing, it is not meditation at all.

Witness Consciousnes

A word which is often used in yoga vedanta is witness consciousness. Unfortunately, because of words, one uses expressions like 'the self is witness consciousness.' That is, the self is not involved in my experiences of pain, pleasure, happiness, unhappiness, health, sickness. When you use such an expression, 'the self is a witness of my experiences', it becomes so completely and thoroughly confusing that you do not know what it really means.

It is then that the mind, the intellect begins to work on it. In order to work on it though, again I have to be separate, which gives rise to innumerable concepts. These concepts lead to ludicrous results, i.e. you can cut my arm and it does not affect me, that I can enjoy myself, I can drink wine, dance, do what I like, but nothing affects me. Somebody can insult me, but it does not affect me. I have the same attitude towards my friends and my enemies. The funny thing is that all these are merely concepts, projected or produced by the intellect, in order to satisfy itself that I have understood the phrase. All this happens because originally we used one false or defective expression - that I am the witness consciousness, and therefore I am not affected by the experiences that come to me.

This expression 'witness consciousness' has to be split into two. First it is consciousness. As consciousness it is indivisible, as consciousness it has no beginning, no end, nothing at all. It is impossible for anything in the universe to exist which does not have consciousness as its content? If consciousness was not the content of a thing, it could not be understood or recognised. Those flowers are consciousness and the intervening space is consciousness, and I am also consciousness.

But there is a concept that they are flowers. This is me, Swami Venkatesananda, is also a concept. These are not realities, because the flower does not say 'I am a flower.' And when this person who says 'I am Swami Venkatesananda' starts enquiring into its nature, he realises that Swami Venkatesananda is merely a label. That label could change any day. A Mr. So and So becomes Swami So and So, and he could then become something else. So, the name is only a label, something which could be put on like a dress.

So now there are two things, one is consciousness, awareness, and on top of it there is this label. The label 'flower' is stuck on by somebody else, not by the flower itself, just as the name Swami Venkatesananda is more or less stuck on by somebody else. That is the situation. There is a concept called flower, there is a concept called me, or Swami Venkatesananda, and there is a concept called the intervening space.

The scripture constantly reminds us that these three are inert and insentient. This is a puzzling thing. How can I be an insentient thing? How can the mind be insentient? When you come back to this, the basis is consciousness;

consciousness is here, consciousness is in the flowers, consciousness is in the intervening space. Only then is awareness or cognissance possible, only then is understanding and seeing possible. Associated vaguely with this are the words 'flower', 'Swami Venkatesananda', and 'space.' If consciousness is the flower, the swami and space, then what are these things called flowers, swami, and space?

When the saint says these are insentient, it means they do not exist as reality but only as concepts. The content of the concepts being consciousness, the concepts are theoretically non-consciousness. So, when you counter it by arguing that you see something physical, they say, since that is non-consciousness and physical is non-consciousness, you are moving away from the main theme. That is what we have always done. Instead of coming back to the main theme, you move away from it by saying 'but then I see something physical.' The man who says that the flower is non-consciousness, is saying that the concept of 'flower' is non-consciousness. When you counter that argument by saying 'I see something, it is there, it is physical,' he says, 'anything physical is non-consciousness, insentient.' And so there is a whole lot of contradiction and confusion. He might say that since the physical body is insentient, it does not exist and therefore, if it is cut, I can withdraw myself from the physical body. 'Withdraw myself' means that consciousness can be cut and separated. On the contrary, right at the beginning you said that consciousness is indivisible. So, this leads to all sorts of crazy phenomena.

When you transpose the simile into the ocean, the wave does not say, 'I am a wave', and the ocean does not say, 'I am the ocean.' Water does not even say, 'I am water.' But to the outsider there is a wave and there is the ocean. If for a brief moment you can dissolve yourself into the ocean, that is - you have completely lost your personality, in that ocean a wave arises, and another wave also arises. On one wave there is a shark, on another wave there is a fish, which could also be a victim of the shark. All of them are part of the ocean, there is absolutely no difference or distinction at all. Both waves arise in the ocean, exist in the ocean, and dissolve in the ocean. They are essentially made of water. One might argue that because they arise in this water, they have no existence apart from this water. All sorts of commotion goes on. The total ocean is a witness of whatever goes on in it. It does not mean that if the shark bites the fish, the fish is not going to bleed. It will bleed. It might even resist the attack, or run away from it. But the totality of the ocean is a silent witness to this whole drama.

What happens to the totality of the ocean in relation to the shark, the wave, the fish and all the happenings in that ocean is called the witness state. It is not possible for us to understand this witness state because, the moment you want to understand it, you throw it out as if it were an object. It is not an object, it is the subject, the only subject. One who lives in that witness state is unaffected by what goes on, in a completely different connotation. Already when you say, 'one who lives in that witness state', you are creating the illusion that it is possible to live other than in this state. That is not possible. The ocean is ocean. The waves are ocean. They have never been separate, they have never been independent of the

ocean. A wave cannot exist independent of the ocean, except perhaps in a painting. And just as we create a painting of a wave without the ocean, so we have created a thing called 'I' and worship it as something distinct from consciousness. Why did we create it to begin with? Because we wanted to experience it.

But can the subject experience itself? It cannot. It is because you want to experience this state of being a witness that you ruin it. For witness really means consciousness, which is totality, not fragmented. It is neither the flower only, nor the swami only, nor the space only. It is the totality all the time, and therefore is not involved in the fragmented experiences of the flower, the swami, or something else. That is the only thing that this witness consciousness means. The totality does not identify itself with a fragment.

Question: You mean it is the one thing that you can never be conscious of?

Swamiji: Exactly. So long as you are trying to be conscious, you are trying to be separate. What causes this apparent division was the desire to experience the transcendental state - cosmic consciousness, the desire to experience infinity or the absolute. The desire to see God is what threw God out. The desire to have self-realisation threw the self out as if it was an object. It creates the concept, and once it has created one concept, it creates others. Whereas to the ocean, the waves are not waves.

That is when the sage comes up with a riddle. He says the waves are insentient, unreal. The waves are maya, not because there is something called maya or unreality, but to the ocean waves are not waves, not even ocean. The ocean is not even aware 'I am the ocean'. Because the moment you want the ocean to become aware 'I am the ocean,' the ocean has to separate itself from the ocean. Consciousness cannot separate itself from itself. Therefore there is no such thing called an object and no such thing called a subject. When that is understood, then all the abnormalities that go in the name of 'I am witness consciousness, I am unaffected by something,' cease. It is not a problem at all.

The fish may be bitten by the shark and then the fish may cry or bleed. The shark may enjoy. All this is part of the ocean and the ocean is unaffected. Waves may lash against the shore, the ocean may be churned by tidal waves, but it is unaffected. The fact that the ocean is unaffected does not mean that the tidal waves do not happen.

So the emphasis must be on dissolving or seeing the notion as an unnecessary notion. When the desire for experiencing even what is called cosmic consciousness is abandoned, then there is witness consciousness. There is consciousness which is witness.

How does one dissolve the notion, the concept or the desire for experience which creates all this mischief? Because if I try to dissolve what I consider to be a desire or a craving, out of that I am creating at least two or three more notions. This is

another trap. How is it possible to be free of this? One must see that even there, there is a desire for an experience. The desire for experience continues in a million forms, whether it is an experience of eating some nice food, having a good swim, or the desire for success, happiness, fame, going to heaven or enlightenment. The same desire continues in different shapes. Whatever shape you give it, it is still the same thing.

Question: Then why do human beings complicate things?

Swamiji: Instead of asking why, can we go to the root of it and see what it is? Because if I am battling with this desire for experience and asking myself why is it there the mind is going to invent a reason. If I try to analyse this experience, the mind is going to create a wonderful philosophy. When we were children we used to have little figures made out of chocolate. Some were made in the form of Rama and some like Ravana. Both out of chocolate, there was no difference. So, can I inquire to the content of this desire for experience, just as I can see that the content of the Rama figure and the Ravana figure are both chocolate, irrespective of what they look like? When the Ravana figure is swallowed he tastes sweet, and so does the figure of Rama.

Question: From what you say Swamiji it means there is no difference between you and me?

Swamiji: Instead of going into that, can I go straight at this? There is a desire for experience, for pleasure, for prestige, for power, a desire for supernatural experiences, a desire to excel. I want to do something different, something superior, and even when all these things are seen to be hollow in one way or the other, I then want to experience a state of transcendental consciousness. I even want to experience cosmic consciousness or witness consciousness.

At some stage I must understand that, as long as I am wishing to experience this witness consciousness or God, I am going to push that away as an object, or I am going to create a concept, with the help of descriptions given in the scriptures, or from what I have heard. I am going to make an image of this and worship it. It is that image which is condemned in the Bible. Do not worship graven images. It does not mean that the image is metallic, engraved. But it is a mental image that you have engraved in your heart or mind. You have created a thing called God or witness consciousness or consciousness absolute.

If you have been brought up in a certain religious tradition which discourages worship of images, you must inevitably cork to this - you have consciousness absolute. You will find that you are haunted by the spelling of those words. If you avoid this, perhaps you will get trapped in a thing called light, which will eventually look circular, and suddenly your mind will tell you, 'that looks like the sun.' So there is also an image. You will abolish it and suddenly you will find written in front of you the word 'God'. What else are you going to do? If you meditate on atman or om, that is also a form. This is because I want to experience

it, and the desire for experience makes it an object, makes consciousness an object.

If that is so, what is the subject, and what is desire, which is the predicate? i.e. what is the content of this desire and what is the content of the self or the subject? When one looks at it directly, what happens?

Answer: It has to dissolve?

Swamiji: We are still sustaining that thing called experience. Dissolving is an experience just as arising is an experience. The arising arose on account of a desire to experience and the dissolving happens also on account of another desire for experience. The dissolution becomes an experience. In this dissolution you still keep the thing as an experience. If you have understood that, you have understood the whole of the Yoga Vasistha. That is what they call the cosmic dissolution. There is nothing, there is no cosmos in the first place. You went on with this adventure thinking you had got it. 'I have now looked into this thing called experience and I have now looked into the subject and predicate, and now that I have got it, the whole thing is dissolved.' And that is an experience too. You now come with a new concept, a new subject, and consequently a new object.

So, without desiring a dissolution of the object, or the desire for experience, without desiring the dissolution of the subject, which is consciousness, if one merely looks at it, the ocean is the ocean is the ocean. You realise that the content of the concept is called consciousness, you realise that the content of the flower is consciousness, you realise that the content of the name called flower is consciousness, and you realise that the content of the name Swami Venkatesananda is also consciousness. You realise that the content of the word 'desire' is consciousness and you realise that the content of experience or experiencing is also consciousness, which is exactly what the ocean is. The ocean does not say, 'I am the ocean.' It does not say, 'I am water.' The ocean does not say, 'there are waves on me, or in me or of me.' The ocean does not even say, 'the content of the waves is me.' Nothing. And while none of these things happen, everything happens. That is called witness consciousness, and therefore you and I are one and there is no difference between me and you.

Let's go back to the dough. You are making some models out of the dough and because you like Jesus Christ, you make models of him. But before you bake them, Amrita comes and says, 'they are no good,' and pushes all the dough together again. All your images are dissolved, and out of the mass of dough she is going to create another image, perhaps the sun. So she makes about 100 pieces of divine light, but someone else comes along and says, 'no, we want to create a formless form', in which case that is not possible. So, every time you try to dissolve something, you are creating something else in its place.

Question: Since there are an infinite number of possibilities, it is hard for me to visualise that you are ever going to stop.

Swamiji: You have stopped. When you realise that the possibilities are infinite, you are not interested in creating anything anymore. Your mind is creating or transforming - meaning changing the form, only because you think it is possible somehow to avoid the trap of the name and form by doing something else. When you realise that that is also going to be a form, then there is a psychological freeze. That is enough. There is no mind at that time. Once the mind arises, the desire for experience also arises. Mind is the divider between the subject and the object. That is why you will find in Swami Sivananda's books the statement, 'mind is a bundle of thoughts and concepts.' You go on picking up one concept after the other. Because you are dissatisfied with this experience, you want some other experience. But he who enquires into the content of the subject, the experience and the object ... no words are possible after that.

Question: Lot of your teaching lacks a method.

Swamiji: It is quite simple. I want to look within, at the subject, the object and the action. Some people say that they can work on that. Ramana Maharshi enquired 'who am I?' You say, I cannot do that, I want a method. I want a method to help me work on this business of discovering the subject, finding who am I. It is a complete sentence, and that sentence should never be dropped. I want a method by which I can be enabled to discover the subject, the predicate and the object. I want a method to discover the self, the object and the experience. That sentence is a whole and should never be dropped or split.

Perhaps a great sage tells us, alright you want a method, I will give you one. Sit down and do some pranayama. This is a method. Immediately the method is given, the best part of the sentence has dropped away. You asked for a method in order to discover the content of the subject, the predicate and the object, and now that you have the method, that is gone. You are chewing the method now. It does not suit me. My nose is constantly blocked. So, instead I was told to go to the puja room and offer some worship. This is also a method for discovering the self, the object and the content of the experiencing. But instead of doing that, you are quite content with the first few words. I want a method, I have now got a method and I will go on with the method. It is not the fault of the sages. Exactly as you have said, I have said, and so many others have said: 'I want a method in order that I may reach there.' So, infinite methods are evolved, but once the method is given you are quite satisfied with it alone.

Question: You are stuck on the desire again?

Swamiji. Allright, but even if I am stuck, I cannot be stuck on the desire.

Question: But when you get stuck on the method - and this is where you are when you are constantly practicing, you get caught in the goal and forget the rest. The goal becomes the puja.

Swamiji: You cannot make it the goal. It is not the goal. Therefore you are dissatisfied, you want something else. If it is the goal, you are happy. It cannot be the goal, because if it were, you would be satisfied. I am quite happy with doing puja every morning, I want nothing more. I do not want any other experience. But you are not. The spiritual practice also becomes the boy-friend set-up. You pick up one and drop it, pickup another and also drop it. But if I am satisfied, it's perfect.

I am emphasising this because there have been great saints who have been satisfied with that. They had no other desire, and that desire in time dissolves. If that can be the goal, then from then on there is no desire at all, because that is all that I wanted. I have reached the goal. Even that is not a desire anymore because I have got it. I wanted to do puja, I have got the puja, so there is no more desire to do puja and I have no desire. But this does not happen, which means that it is not the goal.

Question: All form is inevitably changing, but the fact that the subtance is inevitably changeless means there is liberation from fear.

Swamiji: The freedom from fear is not suggested as a goal, but a statement of fact. If that happens, then I would come up with a counter argument. You can be sure that you have reached that realisation only when you are completely fearless. So, as long as you fear, you are still a fool. If one sees that fear is no solution to a problem, the fear goes away. When it threatens to arise, you look inside and see exactly what the content of this fear is.

Meditation

Whether we regard meditation as an exercise or as life itself, it is important not to get caught up in words. It is also important not to get caught up in a method. We may even use a mantra, but repeating the mantra is a method. We are also told that we should 'artha bhavanam' , that is contemplate the meaning. For instance, what is the meaning of the word 'cloth'? You look it up in the dictionary and the dictionary gives you a description. We have lost the true understanding of the word 'meaning' - this is cloth, and there is absolutely no other meaning to it. You use the word cloth and say, 'what is the moaning of the word cloth?' This is the meaning of the word cloth - Swamiji holds his dhoti. Nothing else. The rest is merely a description. You can say a cloth is a piece of material woven with threads. But this is not right. What is material? All that is description, and these descriptions seem to make sense only because you have seen them before.

There is a funny story to illustrate this. A poor blind beggar lived next door to a millionaire. One day he heard weeping and wailing in the rich man's house. So he went around to investigate. He found the master of the house crying and asked, Why are you crying sir?' 'My first and only child died,' said the rich man. 'Died of what?', asked the beggar. 'He died drinking milk,' said the millionaire. 'What is milk?' asked the blind man. The millionaire explained that it was white liquid, but the beggar wants to know what white is. 'The colour of the crane,' says the rich man. 'But what is crane?', asks the beggar. The rich man shows the beggar his bent arm and says chat a crane is like his arm. 'No wonder the child died swallowing that,' says the beggar.

That is what comes from describing instead of finding the meaning. So, cloth can only be this and no other thing. The leaning of cloth is this. Anything that you have not seen, you have not seen, and no amount of words is going to replace what you have not seen. To someone who has not seen an ocean, you cannot describe it. There is a lovely expression in the Ramayana. The sky is only like the sky, you cannot compare it with anything else. The ocean is incomparable, it is only the ocean. You cannot say that the ocean is like a pond magnified a million times. And so it is said in the Ramayana that the fight between Ravana and Rama was exactly like Ravana and Rama. If you have not seen them fighting, you do not know what it looked like.

So, we have gone two steps away from the meaning. Not understanding the truth, we invent a word and in order to make it clear, we describe it by using other examples. You have not seen a piece of cloth and I'm trying to explain it to you. You ask me what a cloth is, and because I cannot show you, I give you an explanation or a description by means of some comparison with something else which you have seen. A cloth is like a leaf. But there is a difference. The difference is the most essential thing there. The difference is the meaning.

From childhood we are used to confusing the meaning with a description. Meaning in Sanskrit means the object itself. 'Artha' means an object, 'artha'

means meaning, in the sense of the dictionary moaning and 'artha' also means the object, 'artham.' So you repeat the mantra and contemplate the meaning. This does not mean that the mantra 'Om Namah Shivaya' is Lord Shiva, and that Lord Shiva is sitting there like a little god whom I bow to. That's a description, a drama, in which nothing is understood.

Instead, if I am to contemplate the meaning, I must see the the truth as it is, without a description. In this there is no image, no idol, there is no concept, nothing. You may adopt the method, that when you repeat a mantra 'Om Namah Shivaya' you are seeing Siva. Or you may repeat the mantra 'Soham. Soham literally means 'I am that'. But if I am to contemplate the truth, the artha, I must know what the 'I' is, I must know what that is. So you enter into meditation instantly. The moment you repeat 'Soham,' you ask: 'what is the 'aham', what is the 'so'? But you do not ask by means of using a description. If you resort to a description, then you will find that your mind will naturally, through association of ideas, go at least sixteen thousand miles in five seconds.

First repeat 'Soham', 'I am that.' Then ask: what is 'I'? This is Ramana Maharshi's method. I do not have to depend upon anybody else's description of who the 'I' is, because I am repeating the mantra. How do I know that I am repeating the mantra? Because I hear it. I am quite certain that I am repeating the mantra, because I hear it. Let the mind stay in that for a few moments, just to make sure that I am repeating the mantra, because that is the sheet anchor. Where does that mantra repetition take place? Is it in my nose, in my eyes? Keep your eyes open. Is it in the throat? When you say it aloud, it is obviously in the throat. But when I do not make that noise with the throat, where does the mantra repetition take place? Because 'I am' repeating it, what is 'I'? 'I' is the one that is repeating this mantra right now. Absolutely no description of this 'I' is possible. Do you agree with that? Vasistha is going to tell you that 'I' does not exist, but for the present we are not interested in that.

If I can find out where this mantra is being repeated, where this repetition of the mantra takes place, I have also discovered who the 'I' is. It's a simple and direct method. Inevitably this focusing of attention upon the location of the repetition of the mantra prevents the mind the attention from straying. That is how Patanjali's Yoga Sutra describes concentration. The attention of the mind is severely restricted to just this one problem, where does this mantra repetition happen? And whatever it is that repeats the mantra at that time is presumably the 'I'. That's it. There are no words, but there is a sudden understanding of 'this is it.' When the answer 'this is it' appears on the mental screen, i.e. here it is, either on the right or left side of the heart, wherever it is, then naturally, without any effort, if you are awake and intelligent, the next question arises, 'if that is it, who am I?'

If I can see and observe, discover where the mantra is repeated, and who it is that is repeating the mantra, and can point to that, 'this is repeating the mantra; here the mantra is being said,' then I can ask, 'who am I that is able to point out that,

who am I that is able to observe that, who am I that is able to discern that? Am I one or two? One ego is observing that, one ego is being observed, the observing ego and the observed ego. If I am only one, then I am the observer and the observed. But these are words. It should happen.

So, without answering, I am asking this question, but without using any words at all. It is more looking, like a child. First I am looking at the sound of the mantra and at that time there is deliberate mental activity. The question is dropped into the mind, where is the sound of the mantra heard, or who is repeating the mantra? They both mean the same thing. When these questions are asked, there is an intense focusing of attention upon the mantra itself. The dictionary meaning of the mantra disappears. You are no longer interested in all the descriptions concerning the mantra, but only in the mantra itself. When I am locked face to face with this mantra, at that point, the next question automatically arises. 'If I am repeating the mantra, and that which repeats the mantra is me, who am I that is observing that?'

That is what is meant by enlightenment. There are only three steps and there you are. Once this is accomplished, if we may use such an expression, it is possible to meditate constantly whatever happens. If someone pinches me, I am told it is pinching. It is a word like the mantra. What is the meaning of the word 'pinching?' This, without a word, without a description, is pinching. What is it? Immediately you must go into meditation. Can the mind be prevented from throwing up memories and translating this pure experience into description? Pure experience is completely free from all description.

In the same way we ask, 'what is pain?' You may say, 'that is pain, oh, it's terrible,' if someone puts a pin into your foot. But in leprosy for instance there is anaesthasia of some of the limbs, a kind of paralysis and therefore no sensation at all. If a doctor comes and pinches or crushes a limb which has leprosy, there is no sensation in the limb. If that limb is treated and the sensation returns, when it is pricked or pinched, I am delighted. So, the same thing is pleasure and pain. The truth has nothing whatsoever to do with your description of it as pleasure and as pain. That which is, is quite different from pleasure and pain. It is totally independent.

Is it possible to discover the truth? It is possible, only if you do not stick a label and take that for the truth. We all use words and descriptions. We have to use the label, but the intelligence, the mind, should be trained not to regard the label as the truth. If I have some pain in my liver, for instance, I have to be able to communicate this to the doctor. I use the label, but it is good to remember that the label is not the truth, it is not the fact. If this simple truth becomes habitual, then we are able to deal with all life's situations in terms of truth.

This is what your famous devotion to truth means. Not ahimsa satyam, not that I am always telling the truth. If I think you are a crook and tell you so, that is another problem. Truth means 'what is it'? I can see the label called dishonesty.

What is it? That is the truth in the situation? That is why it is said that a yogi is constantly looking for the truth in all situations. He sees the label. For instance, when somebody gets annoyed with me, I can see the label, 'she is annoyed with me.' 'Annoyed' is a label, and 'with me' is another label. 'I am upset' is yet another label. When these labels are peeled off, what is the truth? Then one sees the annoyance as nothing but a displacement of energy, a movement of energy within, and when that is seen, the annoyance is gone. Why did it happen? Because the intelligence felt, 'I am insulted.' And what is the truth concerning this 'I am insulted?' Nothing at all. 'I' is a nice little image that somehow arose in this intelligence and thought of itself as untouchable, a divine being. When she said 'you are an idiot,' that cloud, which had built itself into a god was shattered. When the truth is seen concerning the non-existence of an assumed reality, the annoyance, the hurt, falls away.

Fear is a word, anxiety is a word. That is why I suggested that there is not such a serious distinction between fear and anxiety. Once you come that far in search of truth, you also find that there is no distinction at all between love and hate. You use the same silly little body, the same flesh, that's all. What is it that is afraid? The same thing. The same thing that loves in one direction is afraid in another direction. It is what loves that is also afraid, it is what loves that also hates. I love my wife and I hate somebody else, the other man who loves her.

The truth is the meaning devoid of the acceptance of the label. We do not say the word label because I do not think we are going to get rid of labels, but devoid of the ignorant acceptance of the label as truth.

You have a simple example at your fingertips. Drugs are disposed in bottles, and the bottles have labels. If the labels drop away, homeopathically you are supposed to throw the pills away because now you do not know the distinction between one pill and the other. So the label is important. But because I am told that the label is important, I do not go on licking the label. I look at the label and take the medicine. So I look at the label called pain or anxiety, but I am not going to go on thinking of the label, taking the label as the truth.

That is the content of that label? I have used a word anxiety. What is the truth, what is the meaning, what is it? This is cloth, and no other description is adequate. This is anxiety, what is it? If I do not discover it at all, describing a thing without having realised the truth is dishonesty. That is half the statement. The other half of the statement is that when the truth is seen, all descriptions fall away or seem to be inadequate. There is a famous expression, 'they who know do not speak, they who speak do not know the truth.' Immediately you realise that it is not possible to express it. A thing called anxiety has arisen. What is it? Once you see that, the word 'anxiety' does not seem to be adequate at all. It does not mean a thing, it is something totally different. The answer is a label. What we have been calling answers so far are merely labels. Who wants labels?

We have been brought up on this, brought up on describing. I believe the first

thing God asked Adam to do was to name everything. That is what we are doing. Once we have named these things, we take it for granted that the label is the truth, the label is the medicine.

Is there a thing called fear apart from the name? Does fear exist apart from the word 'fear?' What is this pinching? If that word 'pinching' did not exist, what would this be?

Answer: I can only feel something.

Swamiji: If that word 'feel' did not exist, what would you say?

Answer: Nothing.

Swamiji: If that word 'nothing' did not exist, what would you say?

Answer: Ouch!

Swamiji: If that word 'ouch' did not exist what would you say? Eventually you are going to say that minus that word this is nothing. If that word was not there, this is nothing.

Answer: But something happened inside.

Swamiji: If the word inside was not there ... and therefore at that point there is pure experiencing and its corresponding action. The thing called anxiety did not exist, the thing called fear did not exist, the thing called pain did not exist. That is what Jesus Christ meant when he said, 'unless you are like little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. To the child, all these mental processes are absent.

Question: Swamiji, when you pinch, you feel something different from another?

Swamiji: That is because we are caught in the label. If you are pinched, you laugh or you are annoyed, depending entirely upon who pinches you. That is where the mind works.

Question: That is instinctive?

Swamiji: Unfortunately you are using the word instinctive in a derogatory sense, and therefore the label has assumed a station of dignity. To be instinctive is the wrong thing to do. So we have to restrain ourselves in this, and not take the label for truth. The label may be there, it may have to be there, it may even be useful. But the label is not the truth. From there on, life takes on a completely different texture, for the mind is not calculating at all.

Choice

Choicelessness has got a very beautiful meaning, and if that is not understood, then you can keep getting more and more confused. What is it that makes the choice?

Answer: Conditioning.

Swamiji: What is it that you call conditioning? Who is it that makes the choice?

Answer: The 'I' that wants it.

Swamiji: Is there a thing called I? Once again it goes back to that. Until one discovers that what one has taken for granted - the ego - is a non-entity, choicelessness is not possible. Or, one must clearly understand what that word 'conditioning' means. And one must understand that it is the conditioning that makes choices all the time.

Once again there is no choice. That is, if you are conditioned in a certain way, there is no choice. You go on acting in a certain way. That was Ramana Maharshi's attitude. A fool has to act foolishly. But there is an original choice, to be foolish or to be wise. The choice is somewhere right behind. To act wisely, to be in wisdom, or to be in un-wisdom; to be in the light, or to be in darkness. That kind of choice can be made. Even that is almost choiceless; because, if you are a fool, you are not going to look for the light. In darkness you do not even know that there is a thing called light. That is one question which nobody can answer. And therefore they say that either grace or satsanga, or a combination of several factors, like pain or tragedy in life, and at the some time satsanga, can help one face the light.

How are these two brought together? The coconut falls and the crow alights on it. Without any causal relationship, those things happen. And when those two things happen, when there is a tragedy and there is satsanga at the same time, then it is possible that an inner awakening takes place. In the darkness you seek the light, and once you have started to look for the light, then of course you go on towards the light. Never mind what happens, you have no choice.

So, choicelessness is possible to understand only if you realise that it is conditioning that makes choices, or the non-existent ego that pretends to make choices. Otherwise you sit there and say, 'Om Om, I should not make any choices.' Then what must I do? I must live in choiceless awareness. What must I do now? Shall I do it that way or shall I do it this way? It is a ridiculous procedure.

In all this there is the foot and the mouth. You tickle the foot and the mouth smiles. So, in order to make the mouth smile, you must know where to tickle. In order to achieve this thing called choicelessness, I must work at it somewhere

else, in some other direction which is apparently totally unrelated to it. Then it is possible to live choicelessly but not stupidly, foolishly. Choiceless living is not foolish living.

There is a famous expression - sleep over it. You decide that tomorrow you want to do so and so. You drop that into your mind when you go to sleep and let it germinate. When you get up it must act. Meditate upon this before you go to bed and when you get up the position is clear. The only problem is that, if it is a serious thing, you must have the self surrender to drop it into your subconscious and then go to sleep. If it is a serious problem, you take it up at night, meditate, and then find you cannot go back to sleek, that is another problem. So somewhere that ego barrier must be removed. At some point you must be able to remove the ego from the scene, saying, 'it is alright, somehow, somebody will look after it.' You need a certain devotion though, a certain surrender and confidence to be able to do this. If that is not there, then you get worried. If worry takes over, then again I must have the intelligence to look at it and say 'this worry is not going to solve the problem.'

I do not know if this appeals to you, but that is how I cured myself of all these problems. I can get angry, I can rave, but I see instantly that this is not going to solve the problem, there is no sense in it. I can fight with you, make your life and mine miserable, but it is not going to solve the problem. When the intelligence sees that this is not the solution, then my anger, my anxiety vanish. I am not dropping what I want to do. I want to do something, but getting frustrated about it, getting anxious about it, or afraid of it, is not going to solve the problem. It is not going to make me achieve that. When that understanding is there, these tantrums drop away, and now the intelligence acts as it has to. And it is bound to come up with the right solution. It is as simple as that.

We were going to the Queen Elizabeth College one day and it was blowing a gale and raining with a cyclone warning in force. You asked me, 'why must you go in such conditions. You are not bound to go, you are not paid for it?' I asked you, 'If I do not go, what am I supposed to do? Stay in the ashram? There is no sense in remaining in the ashram.' There is no sense in going and there is no sense in staying. This is not important, and that is not important either. When both of those things are seen to be unimportant, they both drop away. But this being an intelligent living organism has to function, and will continue to function in life. One has to cut it there. This is not important and that is not important. When the ego that wanted to do it or wanted not to do it is dropped, then things happen as they have to happen.

The question, 'is it alright then for me to lie down and go to sleep?' is not only irrelevant, but mischief. Very quickly you are using this philosophy to make a choice, make a wrong choice. Either way it does not matter, so, 'can I do this?' This is a choice. The truth or the trick lies in the seeing and the seeing is the action. We are all very clever people, we want a result without doing anything about it. One must see that the whole game is absurd. I must live a choiceless life

from here on. I do not have to make a choice. So I can do ... already you are making a choice. So, when you detect that, you do not even allow the sentence to be completed. One must be extremely watchful. I want to defuse the choicomaker, which is the ego, and if that is defused, who makes the choice? There is no choice.

I insisted that the key to the choiceless awareness is elsewhere, doing something else. I am not going to live a choiceless life, or I am not going to make a choice of living a choiceless life. I turn around to see who it is that is making the choice. Is that a reality? I am making the choice. Who is this 'I' that is making the choice? It does not exist. That's all. If that is soon as a fact, a reality, not as a set of words, then you are in choicelessness. It is the other way around. I am not trying to say that 'I am going to be a choicoless liver from now on.'

Question: So, when you are engaged in choiceless action or a certain activity, you forgot the choice?

Swamiji: When you are engaged in an activity, there is no choice, you are already in it. When you are engaged in that activity, where is the choice? There is an intelligence which is not mechanical. Choicolessness arises from there. Or, to put it the other way round, the choice happens there, not in the 'me', but in that intelligence. It is the intelligence beyond the 'me' that makes the choice, which is an absurd game, because I do not know. It is only a speculation. The 'me' does not make the choice, the 'me' only thinks it makes the choice. And when it thinks that it makes the choice, it does so because it wants to achieve something; it has a desire and a will to prompt it. It is the will that is the 'me.' And since it is pushing in a direction that it thinks is the right choice, it is going to run into difficulties, if what it expects does not happen.

Question: In other words, that 'me' should bow down and let something else happen?

Swamiji: Naturally that 'me' can bow down in other ways. For instance, in the approach we are taking, if the 'me' sees that things do not happen the way I want them to happen, I can bow down immediately, and say, 'I do not want to bother about it. Whatever happens, let it happen.' At some point the 'I' or the ego, or the 'me' must realise that my choice does not work.

Question: So then you just stop trying?

Swamiji: Stop choosing. But since the organism is both intelligent, efficient, dynamic and active, it will go on functioning. Whichever approach we adopt, the end result is the same. It is absurd though to assume the end result and then start working on it. Then the 'I', the ego is very much alive. I want to live a successful life, a peaceful life, an enlightened life, and therefore I am doing this. Immediately it is gone.

So the whole truth lies in concentrating on the means themselves, on enquiring into the nature of the 'me', into the nature of the choice maker, into the nature of the choice. And then, what happens, happens. If I fail, there is no failure because I have no goal. I am merely interested in finding out who the choice maker is, and who it is that is making the decision. Where does the decision come from?

In this method of enquiry there is no failure, because while you are enquiring, you are still enquiring. If I get an answer, it i's success; but if I do not get an answer, I am still enquiring. I keep going. And therefore, in yoga there is no failure. While you keep going, you are striving, working hard, and of course, if you have got the answer, intuitively, non-verbally, it is a success.

Question: It helps to get rid of the goal, doesn't it?

Swamiji: I must see that the goals I have set for myself are self-defeating and frustrating. That is, if I do not reach the goal I have set for myself, I am frustrated, and if I reach the goal that I have set for myself, it is self-defeating. I find that that is not what I wanted.

Question: If you take the idea of success or failure or judgment out of it, then this also helps to eliminate the idea of a goal.

Swamiji: Quite right, but one hangs with the other. If we are awake, one or two experiences in life will prove this. For instance, as a young boy I could easily see that I had set myself some goals. I reached them quickly and then realised that it was not what I thought it would be. You might say that I made the wrong choice. Maybe if I did something else. Alright, I changed my profession, and again achieved what I wanted. That was the goal, but I found it was no good. Then one moves to something else. It is like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You go there and find the end of the rainbow is somewhere else. Then you realise that the whole thing called a goal is absurd.